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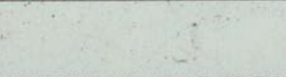

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TO MODDER RIVER

WITH METHUEN

BRITON, BOER, AND BATTLE.

106686

BY

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War Correspondent with the Expedition

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PREFACE.

THE following pages will afford, it is hoped, the first collected account of the work done by Lord Methuen's Flying Column for the Relief of Kimberley, and how it was done.

The writer crossed the Orange River with Lord Methuen, and accompanied his column to Modder River.

The story is of battle, splendid heroism, invincible endurance.

Our forces triumphed over Nature in her more sterile form, sustained long and arduous marches in sand storm or under pitiless sun; fought battles before which Tel-el-Kebir or

Omdurman stands as an Aldershot parade; officers and men alike the heroes of exhausting victories, too often unrelieved by food, water fit only to nourish fever, and night passed on the untented veldt.

This narrative, besides being a record of these things, will, it is hoped, dissipate some illusions fostered at home, put in their true light occurrences which have lashed public feeling into a fury, do justice to a General who laboured from deficient resources, and correct the grim pleasantry "shelled with blunders."

TO MODDER RIVER WITH METHUEN.

CHAPTER I.

Start for South Africa.—A Fishing Expedition for War.

"It seems to me," said a well-known colonel of the Guards, "that our leaders find out the strongest position of the enemy, and then attack him in front."

"It appears to me," put in a brother officer, "that they attack him first, and find out his position afterwards."

This bit of gentle raillery at the expense of our friend the General, coupled to the abundance of everything we did not want, and the lack of everything we did want, such as

mounted infantry, light cavalry provided by the Colony itself, long range cannon, quick-firing field guns, of which British army has none whatever, and abundance of field artillery for shrapnel, explains the disasters to our forces—first at Dundee and Ladysmith, then at Stormberg and Magersfontein, and, finally, on the Colenso road and upon Spion Kop.

Add to these errors of omission, scouts that did not scout, guides that did not guide, colonels that misunderstood their orders, commanding officers who omitted to find out "what was going on at the other side of the hill," an Intelligence Department which had no intelligence, and a Colonial Secretary as well as a High Commissioner that underrated the enemy; and the measure of the reasons of our failures, alike in Natal and in Cape Colony, is both obvious and full to overflowing.

But it is with the brilliant Flying Column, under the command of Lieutenant-General Lord Methuen, that I

have directly to do. It was to this column, which should have succoured Kimberley and restored Mr. Cecil Rhodes to his friends in eight days, that I found myself attached about the middle of the month of November.

The war correspondent is usually allowed very little time for preparations necessary to his departure for the mystical front. He does not stand upon the order of his going. A summons by telegraph to the office with which he is associated, and, hey, presto! his fate is quickly sealed.

Ordered to-day and off to-morrow—that has invariably been my own experience.

I had twenty-four hours in which to make my peace at home, and fix up my "kit," for the Ashanti Expedition, and in the vilest climate in the world.

"Good-bye. Never mind what you've forgotten," hurriedly cries the manager. "We'll send your camp kettle by the next steamer, and your coffin shall follow."

For a mission to China, in search of a war that never came off (the missionary troubles on the Yangtse Kiang), I was allowed thirty-six hours.

But when orders reached me, one quiet night in the House of Commons, to proceed to Cannes to enquire into the causes of the sad death of Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany, I was allowed just forty minutes in which to secure my bag and catch the Continental mail at Charing Cross.

I had left home in the afternoon, confident "the House" would be "counted out" at 7.30, and promising an early return in consequence. It was fifteen days before I actually reached home.

These incidental personal reminiscences of my own will serve, upon a wider area of experience, to show the gentle reader the feverish pace at which the special correspondent lives and moves.

I received my instructions on the

28th September, 1899, to proceed to Cape Town, in order to be ready for the bursting of the war cloud over the Transvaal, and on the 30th I found myself on board the *Kinfauns Castle*, the new mammoth ship of Sir Donald Currie & Company's fine fleet of Cape liners, and at this time the largest steamer that had been seen south of Madeira.

We were at once passenger ship and trooper. Upon the fore spar-deck were assembled detachments of artillery, bearers of the Army Medical Corps, men of the Army Service Corps, and an interesting squad of the balloon section of our very scientific and up-to-date army.

We had on board, moreover, at least one survivor of historic Majuba Hill days in Lieutenant and Quartermaster T. J. Kearns, who would act as adjutant during the voyage.

We were old comrades, he and I having met and campaigned in the Coomassie bush. Lieutenant Kearns

did not greatly cheer the young officers on board by his accounts of Wet South Africa. We were, it appeared, sailing straight for the Wet season, especially in Natal, and we listened with a shiver to stories of valleys turned into seas, and of plateaus and roads impassable to horse, cart, or foot; highways wrecked, transport stopped in the deep rutted ways, and supplies cut off as effectually as if by a triumphant enemy, while troops lay in a saturated laager on the slope of a kopje.

Not a very inspiriting reminiscence this, it must be owned; but Lieutenant Kearns is much too good a fellow and patriotic a soldier to have wished himself ashore with his reminiscences of bad-weather campaigning on the Tugela. He, himself, was only too happy at the prospect of joining his old and amiable chief, Colonel Ward, of the A.S.C., and treasurer of the popular Military Tournaments at the Agricultural Hall.

In addition to the officers actually connected with the troops or the sections of the scientific arms of the service on board, we had a number of half-pays and young hopefuls of spirit, going out in the hope of obtaining employment at the front.

Needless to say that the highest spirits were manifested on the troop-deck, forward of the bridge.

We parted from our moorings beside the great dock of Southampton with music and song, for besides the band upon the quay, sent down to play the big ship upon her "maiden voyage," we had one of our own on board. Then, as to the choruses, we had the "Tommies", lining bulwark and crowding bows and rigging. The ballad that afterwards held the ship was a patriotic jingle started by a private of the Balloon Corps, who lustily trolled it forth, seated across the big foresail boom. It was a paraphrase called "The Promised Land," and the refrain that "fetched"

officers, men, and Colonials ran as follows :—

"We'll let them understand
We've not forgot Majuba
In the Promised Land."

A private of the A.S.C., sitting high in the rigging, was asked from the shore if he had a good view up there. "My prospects," he replied, with an accompanying titter, "are a little cloudy at present,"—alluding, of course, to the prospect of war. I remembered the young fellow's face long afterwards, and I recall it as it lay, livid with the pain of death, upon the bloody field of Belmont. He had too grimly, alas! realised his prospects.

CHAPTER II.

At Sea.—A Curious Psalmist Coincidence.—How "the Bay" treated President Kruger.

THE *Kinfauns Castle* speedily proved herself an excellent sea boat. We experienced two bad days in the Bay of sometimes fabulous terrors, but she "stood up" manfully against the famous "Western labourers." Nevertheless, all the lady passengers were confined to their state rooms, and not a few of the officers to theirs also.

All told, there were 300 soldiers of various branches of the service. With their officers, these gallant rankers formed a brilliant escort for Lady Forestier-Walker, proceeding to join her husband, General Sir F. Forestier-Walker, the new Commander-in-Chief at Natal, in succession to Sir William Butler. Lady Forestier-Walker is a

true soldier's bride — young, pretty, and bright—and she quite shared the anxiety of the moment with her husband's A.D.C., Lieutenant D. Beale Brown, the officer in attendance; Colonel H. Clarke, Lieutenant-Colonel H. W. Mapleton, Lieutenant-Colonel M. C. Cooke-Collis, and Majors Jack, Moulton, Barrett, Love, as well as a group of captains and lieutenants, who fringed the rail of the hurricane-deck for the news of the hour. All these officers are keen-faced men, capable of going anywhere and doing anything. The War fever was upon each, attended only by the fear there would be no war.

President Kruger, had he attended our first service, which happened to be on the first of the month, in the Bay of Biscay, might have listened to some improving coincidences. It would not have happened so if it had not been the first of the month. But these passages from the first, and earlier, of the Psalms of David

appeared instinctive of prophetic appropriateness :—

"The ungodly, they are like the chaff which the wind scattereth away from the face of the earth.

"Desire of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession.

"Thou shalt bruise them with a rod of iron, and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

The allied contingent, dwelling together for the purpose of the service in the grand saloon, seemed to feel the words of the Psalmist, for they followed the chaplain with a vigour of emphasis which more than belonged to the discipline of the regimental schools.

In view of the British re-inforcements landing, or on the way, the words in the next psalm, speaking the wail of David, might have seemed to bear more appropriately to Mr. Kruger, for they read :—

"Lord, how are they increased that trouble me, many are they that rise against me."

But his Honour would have perhaps seen the hand of Divine retribution

here; for the minister, Rev. E. Watson, fell to the historic humours of the Bay of Biscay, and fled with handkerchief to mouth. Did this bring the service to an abrupt close? Not at all. Lieutenant F. B. R. Chatterton, presiding at the organ, promptly took up the book, and, conferring a moment with Major H. R. H. Jack, A.S.C., in command of troops, gave out hymn 91,

"ONWARD, CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS."

This exactly suited Tommy and his comrades, and they all let themselves "go" to the words:—

"Marching as to war,
* * *
Forward into battle."

Mr. Watson's (happily brief) indisposition was disappointing, as it deprived the soldiers of an improving discourse, and, in particular, abbreviated their sojourn in the beautiful saloon of the *Kinfauns Castle*.

But the coincidence between the regulation portion of the service and

the mission upon which the men are engaged could not fail to strike the mind of all alike. The Bay, too, seemed ashamed of its conduct, for it almost immediately put on its better behaviour.

It was, I need scarcely say, an anxious moment for most of us as the shore boat pulled alongside on our arrival off Madeira. We knew nothing later than Saturday's news, and it was now Wednesday. Our course lay away from morning newspapers, second editions, and "hextra speshuls." The later developments of the "new diplomacy" was far behind in our wake. We had slipped out on the top of one Cabinet Council, and had arrived here at the close of another. What had happened, and what was going to happen? Had Mr. Kruger replied to the last note on "Policy No. 1"? Had Her Majesty's Government clenched "Policy No. 2"?

We heard from the owners' boat that things "were as they had been." So the war cloud hung promisingly after all.

On our arrival at Cape Town we had been thirteen days beyond the reach alike of land and of news. But though I and some colleagues fretted at the uncertainty of what was before us, the military on board—and these formed by far the larger portion of the passengers—awaited the result with smiling nonchalance. Tommy attended parade, underwent inoculation for typhoid, slept on the forecastle deck, and gave by far the best concerts on the voyage. The officers, after the wont of British officers, played cards, gambled on "sweeps," and coquetted with the lady passengers.

So, whether it was to be peace or whether it was to be war, her Majesty's red coats, blue coats, and khaki coats took it all philosophically.

A voyage to the Cape is enchanting or disappointing, just as the traveller himself makes it. Certainly it is not without illusion and disappointment. The notion which exists that it is a voyage all of sunshine and blue water

and equable climate may be dismissed. There are long intervals of cloudy sky, grey and turbulent sea, swoony heat, dead cold, and the doldrums.

I might mention here, before proceeding to the Equator, the already alluded to subject of preventing our troops contracting typhoid fever whilst campaigning. The first thing to be done is done by the surgeon, who carefully washes his hands with an antiseptic, brushing his finger-nails so as to render the whole germ free. The part of the body chosen for the operation is the flank, and this also is washed germ free. The instruments to be used have in the meantime been boiled, to render them germ free likewise. Hot soap and water are used upon the flesh. When all is ready, an incision is made in the flesh, and an antiseptic lotion of turpentine and water rubbed on the hands is injected. The antiseptic lotion is also made germ free by boiling. The injection is made by means of a syringe, which likewise is carefully cleansed, for

the germ is a cosmopolitan beastie, which is at home anywhere, and may cling and even thrive in a sponge, which is never used in this operation until it is boiled. Olive oil or glycerine may be used; in fact one or the other is an indispensable adjunct, and is heated up to 160° Centigrade. At that temperature it will kill at sight any germ it touches. In twenty-four hours the patient passes through the reaction of fever, headache and sickness. The seat of the injection swells, and the glands become affected. In a day or two the man is better, and he is typhoid cased for a couple of years. This interesting anti-toxin was brought into use on board the *Kinfauns Castle* by Lieut. "Tod" Sloan, of the Army Medical Department. It seems that South Africa, and especially Natal and the Transvaal road, are liable to epidemics of a typhoidic character.

We crossed the line, so-called, on Tuesday, the 10th October, but without the old historic ceremony. Neptune

no longer—at least, in steamers—comes over the side and wags his trident and his locks under the catheads. There is no ordeal for the novice, no romping, skylarking, hazing, or "bully-ragging." These are the pranks of the past, and the days of long belated voyages under canvas. The steamer has run down the traditions of the Equator, so much so that the *Kinfauns Castle* crossed the line without a dozen passengers being aware of the interesting circumstance.

It was an ideal cross-channel morning—a grey-blue sky crisped into a whiff here and there of white foam; the sky, dappled with cloud, now fleecy and anon black enough for rain. There was nothing tropical in the scene. But what became interesting was the absence of shade. The sun was vertical, and you had to throw your head well back and your face upwards to see it at all. Everything vertical was the centre of its own orbit. There were none of the oblique

shadows upon the deck to which we are accustomed in Europe. The two large chimneys cast no shadow; the bulging ventilators made a mere blot on the deck at their own feet; only lateral things made any mark upon the sunlit floor. And, oh! the suicidal ignorance of man. A passenger sat him in a chair on the upper deck with the sun beating straight upon his head, and surprised was he to be told that sunstroke came not alone from the back of the neck, but even from a glint in the stomach itself. Hearing this, that innocent of the Equator sprang to his feet and never paused until he had reached the seclusion of his own cabin.

I had about this time a cheerful conversation with an aged Dutch loyalist, residing in Cape Colony, but one inclined evidently to sit on the fence. He declined to pass any opinion upon the prospects of peace. He took refuge behind a pious evasion.

"The result," he said, "is in the

hands of God," and he made such frequent allusion to the Almighty that it became sheer blasphemy.

I grew incensed, and retorted that "my opinion is that the Almighty would not soil His hands with such a deplorable business."

But my Afrikander stuck to his Scriptural guns or precepts.

"It is all," he insisted, "in the hands of God. If there is to be peace, God will order it; if there is to be war, God will say so."

On our reaching Table Bay news was brought on board that the Boers had violated the Cape and Natal frontiers, had torn up railways and pulled down telegraph wires; that towns were beleaguered, and Mr. Cecil Rhodes himself was a prisoner in Kimberley at that moment, with Mafeking closely invested by rebel Dutch.

A steward, going into my burly friend's cabin, found him upon his knees, praying that "God might put His strongest sword into Kruger's hands."

CHAPTER III.

Capetown Joyous in the Midst of War. Diamonds and Refugees.

So it *was* War!

I found the streets of Capetown filled with refugees from the Transvaal, whose numbers were daily increased. At the Mount Nelson Hotel, their chief hostelry in the Colony, lightness and sorrow were curiously blended. The great dining-hall was crowded for the evening meal with refugees of wealth from Johannesburg, Kimberley, and Pretoria itself. The ladies, nothing loth to be resident for a time in Capetown, were radiant in diamonds, while their spouses snivelled in their soup plates at money locked up here and stores closed there.

The scene was curious and suggestive. Yet even the men who whined over the stoppage of their individual

businesses, in harmony with, or in consequence of, a policy they had advocated "up country," did not regret the war itself.

The real sufferers were those in whose interests the peace had been broken—the unenfranchised miners of Cornwall and Devon, who congested the streets of the town, and in whose behalf committees of sustentation were sitting or collecting aid.

Calm, on the other hand, reigned at Government House, although it was easy to perceive in the pallid, anxious face of Sir Alfred Milner how severe had been the strain of the previous two or three months of ceaseless negotiation and copious unremitting despatch writing.

Capetown, nevertheless, was in the midst of war, and the first tangible—I may even say forcible—evidence of it was afforded to myself personally when, on handing in a harmless cablegram for London, I was curtly informed it "must be censored."

I knew too well what that meant. I knew instinctively that it implied the virtual effacement of Press independence during the war, if not the wiping out on the spot of the War Correspondent. My anticipations were only too literally realised.

I must, at the same time, say that I have no fault to find personally with the manner in which the two military censors of that day did their work. Both Major Davies and Major Jones were courtesy itself, and obligingly limited their blue pencil excisions to purely military movements. Nevertheless, one felt it would be necessary to hold a candle to each of these gentlemen as time wore on. It was so, indeed. But I shall have something more to say on the Press censorship.

Although some 20,000 British troops were then in South Africa, yet there was nothing in the appearance of the streets, either of Capetown or Durban, to show that a corporal's guard was in

the country. When reinforcements are landed, they are entrained and passed up country. Regiment after regiment lands and vanishes. It leaves no public record of its appearance and disappearance. The men do not know whither they are bound; the officers have but a vague idea of their destination. One night a naval brigade were slipped ashore and carried up country, vanishing as if they had melted into space, or never had been.

The explanation is obvious. The military authorities are most careful to hide their doings from the Boers, whose spies abound, and who have a method of their own of communicating to Pretoria whatever they learn at Capetown or Durban. The Cape Government Railway, whose headquarters are at Capetown, has been practically taken over by the British military authorities, and is controlled from "the Castle," instead of from Government House. Not a van can be moved without a permit from the military authorities.

A severe and useful espionage is observed of civilian travellers. Every train going North carries troops, and at every station on the route, no matter how late or early the stoppage, the train is beset by loyal Colonists, women predominating, who cheer the soldiers in the most encouraging spirit. Tommy cheers in reply, and the train passes into darkness, and the episode is repeated at the next stopping place.

CHAPTER IV.

A Preliminary Canter North.—On a Kopje Across the Orange River.

My instructions, as sent me by cable from London, were to take over the Western Division of the campaign, which would, of course, keep me in Cape Colony; but at the time I received this despatch the plan of campaign was still in an inchoate or embryo form. General Sir Redvers Buller, it was already known, would shortly arrive to take over the supreme command, but until he appeared details of all kinds in regard to the war and its conduct must be purely speculative. Still, in substance at least, a great central advance by way of De Arr and the Free State was intended.

So having had my place on the stage of the campaign fixed for me in London, I thought I could not do better than go North and see the field which would

presumably, shortly ring with the movement of great bodies of British troops.

A forced journey, part of which was passed in a truck train, brought me on Sunday, 22nd October, to the Orange River. I mounted a kopje and surveyed the country ahead for fully twenty miles; but nothing living broke the glorious silence of that vast and sterile region. A grey ostrich "lopped" gravely in the sand, feeding upon some mysterious product. The air at that elevation—4,000 feet—came sweetly across the desert or kopjes, spruits and drifts, tempering the terrific heat of the afternoon sun. Behind me the Orange River, brown and muddy, flowed majestically beneath the vast iron-girder bridge, the central span quite 250 feet above the river, and the whole a good quarter of a mile across. There was something melancholy in the spectacle of the silent, empty railway track winding round kopjes and finally vanishing in the blue distance, its metals flashing back the silver rays of the sun, just as

if a streak of water had caught a glint of the golden orb overhead.

Our fellows had possessed them of a kopje and behind a fortification of sandbags, with sentries under a lieutenant, a smart look-out was kept.

Orange River itself is simply, as a place, confined to a railway station and an inn, to which is added a store.

The town of the district really is Hopetown, about nine miles off in a north-westerly direction. The plain or veldt here, as elsewhere through the great Karoo country, is edged or broken with chains of kopjes—the small stone hills, pronounced koppies. The river flows about two miles to the north of the railway station, and between Orange River and the British camp lay the 9th Lancers, while upon the banks of the river itself were the tents of a wing of the Royal Munsters.

I enquired here for Colonel Evans, the officer in command of the regiment which I had seen embark from Southampton in August. I desired

to congratulate Colonel Evans upon the realisation of his fondest hope. At Southampton he had expressed a fear that when his regiment reached Cape Town "the war would be off," and he added that "this would be just like my luck."

Happily for a gallant officer's comfort, the commander of the Royal Munsters has, in common with his regiment, seen abundance of service already.

Colonel Kincaid, as Commandant of Orange River camp, which consisted mainly of Government stores protected by a wing of the Northumberland Fusiliers under Colonel Money, received me very civilly, and Lieutenant Masterman provided me with a bell tent for the night that I might spend in camp.

At mess in the evening a telegram was received by Colonel Kincaid announcing that the brilliant British victory at Elandslaagte had followed its predecessor at Glencoe, and the

news having been handed round, there were loud cheers from end to end of the table. Alas, for what followed!

Some men of pessimistic humour saw in these victories the speedy collapse of the campaign, and it was predicted that Buller would reach Capetown to find the war at an end.

Evidently we did not quite know our Boer that Sunday night of glad tidings of great joy on the Orange River.

The "lifting" by the agile Boers of British troops near Ladysmith naturally damped our enthusiasm, aroused by the victories of Glencoe and Elandslaagte, and we on the Western border, from having dwelt in noisy peace, now existed in the expectation of war sweetened by a desire for revenge. But the evacuation of Dundee, coupled to the locking up of Sir George White in Ladysmith, gave a depressing turn to our expectations by causing General Buller to hurry to Natal instead of coming on to De Aar. Such comfort as we derived came as

usual from the recollection that what had happened in the Eastern colony was what had happened to us at the outset of every British campaign, from the Peninsular to the Crimea. We blunder. We court defeat almost, and we wonder afterwards that we got it.

I heard, by the way, that Mr. Kruger caused it to be made known that the man or field cornet who succeeded in grabbing Cecil Rhodes at Kimberley would be rewarded with a farm and its equipment of oxen, horses, and asses. The prize remains unwon.

I have never seen a gentleman more nonplussed than was Captain Penfold when, on reaching Capetown, he heard that Mr. Rhodes was a prisoner in Kimberley. Captain Penfold is one of the De Beers directors, and was going up to Kimberley. But the position resolved itself into this: Mr. Rhodes was locked up in Kimberley, and Captain Penfold was locked out of it. "I would give £500," said the old seaman, "to be in Kimberley now."

CHAPTER V.

At De Aar.—Early Plans for the War.—Concentration of Stores.—Lost Boer Opportunities.

I DECIDED to make De Aar my headquarters. This is the Clapham Junction, in a railway sense, of Cape Colony. It is really a railway station and little else. Everyone derives his means of livelihood from the Cape Government Railway. The houses are all occupied by railway officials or railway servants. The atmosphere is "held up" by smoke and fumes of railway oil.

The local institute and reading-room, both excellent, are identified with C.G.R., and are run by the De Aar staff. Every interest is directly wrapped up in this great railway, which sends branches to Kimberley and Mafeking; to Bloemfontein and

Pretoria; to Port Elizabeth and East London, and to Buluwayo itself. There is in De Aar one hotel, which, like the two stores, are run by the inevitable German. Here, as it seemed to the most ordinary military intelligence, was an ideal base for an army which desired to succour Kimberley, to conquer the Free State, relieve the Natal frontier, and march on Pretoria. Indeed, in this sentence or two I have indicated the original plan of campaign, which provided for three converging lines upon Bloemfontein and Pretoria.

No one, of course, was permitted, as an act of newspaper discovery or prescience, to speak of these things. But the word went about that General Buller would, soon after landing at Capetown, come on to De Aar and organise his army. As if to confirm this understanding, the camp authorities put up a magnificent marquee tent, added to it a mess tent, a corrugated iron bath-room, and wash and cook house, and placed the whole in a

garden and under the British flag and a round of sentries. Finally one morning it was announced in camp that General Buller's cook had arrived. Joy!

Meanwhile, train after train had been bringing up thousands upon thousands of tons of stores, mostly bearing the hall mark of Woolwich, consisting of army rations, medical comforts, and forage, until, by the day that Buller was expected, but didn't come, we had quite two millions sterling of John Bull's money piled here in various bulky values.

I looked ruefully, day by day, from my own tent as I saw this mountain grow and spread, and I thought of next budget night in the House of Commons and a shilling income tax.

CHAPTER VI.

The Gentle Mule.

A WONDERFUL feature in the aggregation of war material or the aids, living and inanimate, to British victory consisted of mules. Thousands of these creatures were brought up.

We are all familiar with the epithet "as stubborn as a mule," and the mule laager at De Aar proved the truth of the epithet. It was extensive, and was separated from the main camp by a wire fence.

One night, I remember with a dismal shudder, we were visited by a cold south-wester, which we felt severely while lying under canvas. The mules, many from warm and distant climes, felt this "snap" perhaps more severely than we did; and the suffering of our four-footed carriers can never be forgotten, for one, by the present writer.

My small marquee tent had been pitched close to this fence, so that as the herd inspanned thereabouts, partly for shelter and partly from the fact that here it was the custom to feed them, I came in for the full force of both the cold wind and riotous mules, for in a riotous mood they were most certainly. One or two contrived to jump the fence, and careering madly amongst the tents, I expected from this position of mine that nothing less than the goring of its peg ropes and its own collapse would result. The dread, indeed, of a regular stampede was present to my mind; and this, as I learned later, was amongst the graver thoughts of Tommy himself.

But what most struck us was the diversity of the cries in which the three or four thousand brutes indulged between their paroxysms resulting from cold and its attendant fright.

Every imaginable animal of the desert, the farm, and the forest was to be heard. The bray of the donkey, so

closely related in appearance to the mule, was really the least heard. There was the roar of the lion as some huge stallion mule bent his head savagely down at the fence. This was heard in company with the yaps of the jackal, the low growl of the tiger, and the sharp, pain-stricken "trump" of the elephant. From some came the lowing as of cows, and from others, again, a strange ring of sounds like the winnying of horses; the grunt of the pig was frequent, and this curiously mingled with a prolonged single note like the shrill crow of a cock. But under and above was a low rumbling of incoherent sounds just as one might listen for in the boiling together of the individual cries of all the rest of the creation. Out of these weldings of distress one would hear in sharp revolt the skirl of the pibroch, the scream of an infant, and the shrieks of many angry women.

A colleague observed of this singular

bear garden for sounds that if Mark Twain could only have been in our place—and many of us wished he or someone else (say a press censor) could have been—he would have had material for one of the most remarkable studies he has ever penned. With the rising of the sun at six, and the warming of the atmosphere, the Babel of many lamentations ceased.

The mules exhibited in harness much of their reputed obstinacy, which resisted even the flagellation of the driver. They were harnessed in spans of ten, two abreast, and driven in long cape waggons by Kaffirs, who are adepts at this kind of work. But on the whole the poor brutes, which can live upon next to nothing, and certainly receive more kicks than halfpence, did the task—that of working the transport trains—very well. If it be true that the man has to be found who ever saw a dead donkey, I have yet to meet with a defunct mule.

It was at this time that the Boers

lost their opportunity of rushing De Aar and Orange River camps, wiping them out, and blowing up our two mountains of stores. In fact, the accumulation of stores had turned this part of South Africa into a vast market, where everything was stored, but nothing was sold; the measure of wheat alone was enough to tempt the most daring speculators of Mark Lane to think of a "corner" in grain. The treasures of Sheffield, of Birmingham, and of the great arms factories of the North, lay about in immeasurable profusion and, I may add, confusion.

But to have reached De Aar, and even Orange River, the enemy must have ventured into the open, and it is into the open that the Boer is never to be enticed by British soldiers. If he fought as other nations, there would have been no Boer war. The Boer method of warfare is indeed what Nature herself has suggested it should be. It is, in a word, what the kopje has made it. Nature has "dumped" down

kopjes all over South Africa, and in nearly every case with a pretty regard to Boer strategy. The Boers in their turn have merely adopted the old tactics of the Kaffirs—tactics still pursued by the Basutos, whose claim it is to have never been beaten as a nation. To fight the Boers, Boer tactics alone should be adopted, and for these we look naturally to the Colonials.

Offers of Colonial aid were, however, refused with freezing politeness by the Imperial authorities, who avowed themselves quite equal to dealing with a rabble of Boer rebels!

De Aar might have been easily shelled, and the destruction of our stores, the real strategic object of the attack, would have thrown the advance back a month or six weeks.

On my arrival at De Aar, I found the northern end of the station defended by a battalion of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, commanded by Colonel Barter, who was good enough to recall my presence in the Ashanti column, where he

served in the Special Service Corps. The southern or Capetown end of the camp was reserved for the store depôt, the remounts and mules.

Colonel Barter was indeed "spoiling for a fight;" and certainly if the Boers had made a descent upon De Aar, he would have come in for the first brunt of the attack. Daily Colonel Barter went out with a picket to the ridge of kopjes which were known to overlook a nest of Dutch farmers infected with the Pretoria spirit, though nominally holding allegiance to the Crown.

But though the Yorkshires stepped it briskly upon the hilltops, and fired off their Lee-Metfords in the blue air, and said, as plainly as pantomime could speak, "Come and tread on the tail of my coat," the Dutchmen continued to sit upon their doorsteps and smoke, and drink bad coffee.

CHAPTER VII.

Living under the Curfew.—The Pleasures of the "Pass."—The Soldiers of Fortune.

And now we will turn, if you please, to a more thrilling topic, the art of living at peace under a military curfew. De Aar had been placed under martial law, and a six to six curfew established. Sharp at 6 p.m. the one bar closes under "sentry go," and at 9.30 every-one must be in bed and all lights out. But the curfew does not cease even from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Innumerable regulations for the government of this South African *campus martius* are enforced. No one who cannot show a pass signed by a magistrate or countersigned by one of the Camp Commandants escapes inquisition and perhaps arrest. The village blacksmith became, rightly or

wrongly, a suspect, and was arrested, not for leaving the station, but for returning to it. He was an ideal blacksmith and a Dutchman, but not an athlete enough to balance himself on the proverbial rail.

The authorities are certainly bearing hard upon the Dutch. It is a genial maxim of the camps that the press correspondents shall say nothing to indicate suspicion of the loyalty of the neighbouring Dutchmen. I was prohibited from cabling how an Afrikander Boer, from whom I wished to buy a horse, said that he "would rather shoot the brute than sell it to an Englishman."

Evidenty one man may steal a horse, while another may not look over the hedge.

The military authorities had brought all the Colonial Dutch thereabouts in a net of suspicion, and the fact was locally emphasised in the remark that a man must not even smile. This "smiling" simile rests upon an incident.

One of the Camp Commandants warned the local hotel-keeper that he must not allow loitering at his bar. "A customer must drink his glass and be gone."

"But how about wanting a second glass or returning a drink?" asked the barman, whereat the hotel-keeper smiled unctuously, and the barman smiled in dutiful compliance too.

"Don't smile at what I say," protested the officer, sternly, "or you may find yourself sent to Capetown Castle."

De Aar itself rather regarded this as a military pleasantry, as the gallant gentleman in question is a charming cynic. But the Dutchman takes it seriously, and grumbles about liability to court martial for a smile.

There are, of course, pleasantries and pleasantries. A correspondent was returning to camp, when he was met by the usual challenge. "Who goes there?" shrieked the sentry. "A friend," replied the correspondent. "Stand, friend, and give the countersign," promptly demanded the watchful

guardian of the camp. The correspondent had forgotten the countersign. He knew it related to Yarmouth. As a matter of fact, it was Yarmouth. So he made a desperate bid for bed, and replied, "Bloaters." The sentry replied, "Advance, friend," and the séance closed. You doubt this *ben trovato?* Well, do not doubt any longer when I plead conviction in personal guilt. I was "Bloaters."

Nevertheless, to an active sentrydom, as well as to a vigilant curfew, we were becoming cheerfully accustomed. It was martial law, and the camp was the centre of Boerdom. Anything, indeed, is welcome, even martial law, if it relieves boredom at the same time. I held on to De Aar as my headquarters, making occasional dashes upon Orange River. But the army of the West was but an army of mules. It was the reign of the donkey. There were mules from every mule-growing nation.

I was in the reading-room when Captain Mackenzie, who commands

the Remount Camp, entered in evident despair.

"What do you think," he groaned, "they have now sent me a thousand Italian mules, and every one a stallion! Protect us from such scenes of emancipated vigour as I have just looked upon."

In truth, the mule ruled here. I do not like to measure his numerical strength, but it was in thousands. The veldt is blackened with the multitude, and his ears bite the skyline like the points of countless bell tents. The Kaffirs appointed to keep the mules off the camp hopelessly surrender. They are unequal to the task, but Tommy comes to the rescue with a couple of tin cans, which beaten at the tail of any mule, or any number of mules, bear the most surprising results.

So we waited for Buller, and then there came news that Buller had been heard from, but, alas! not as being upon the road with the expected 50,000 infantry and cavalry.

It came as an order from Capetown that Stormberg was to be abandoned and Nauuwpoort evacuated. And they were; and the troops thus liberated were added to our camp.

Further news came, and this sent our spirits down to zero; and it was the announcement that General Buller had taken a house at Capetown! And next that he had gone to Natal to relieve General White.

So slowly faded our hope of seeing De Aar the base of the great forward movement, with a force of from 50,000 to 100,000 British troops at General Sir Redvers Buller's back.

We therefore waited, like Mr. Wilkins Micawber, for something to turn up. We correspondents went into business as buyers of horses and donkeys, and what are known locally as Cape carts and light buggies, by either of which the traveller makes his way over the dusty, sun-baked veldt. It would be our form of transport when we took the field. The *Times'* equipped himself

with a covered phaeton not unlike a Roman chariot, and spanned-in six mules, two abreast. Mr. Julian Ralph secured a Napoleonic coach and pair; and Mr. Wollen, a special artist, aroused envy by a carriage worthy of a Lord Mayoralty. Mr. Knight, of the *Morning Post*, brought from Cape-town a wonderfully intelligent horse, which, alas! lost its master at the Battle of Belmont, where he had the misfortune, deplored by every one of his colleagues, of losing an arm.

I deemed myself comparatively fortunate in securing for £85 two horses and a buggy. But really the purchasing power of the English sovereign at this time did not get beyond 8s. 6d. Everything was at least 300 per cent. above home prices. A bottle of Scotch or Irish whisky cost 7s. 6d., and a bottle of lager beer half-a-crown. Soda was sixpence a bottle, and bread threepence a pound. Butter was unknown at De Aar, and the oldest inhabitant never had seen at De Aar a pint of cow's milk.

I mentioned in an early chapter how the war, or the prospect of it, had drawn to Cape Colony a host of aspiring paladins. But, unfortunately for this *corps d'élite*, the young gentlemen found the utmost difficulty in obtaining recognition in the practical form of appointment to one column or another.

Garrison commanders naturally reserved employment for men of their own. There was also the secondary difficulty of not exactly knowing whom the War Office were sending out on special service. But volunteers were not precisely shunted. Each applicant for employment was informed that of course he "did not seek payment;" that he would "naturally provide his own horse," and would be prepared to pay for his rations in return for a free tent, and permission to serve should his assistance as a galloper be needed.

This sounded rather like irony. The notion of headquarters was, of course, that the soldier of fortune in these days

seeks only sport. It was, in fact, a purely sporting offer. The volunteer did not see the matter in that light at all. Nevertheless, he hung tenaciously on to his object. He had paid his passage out from England; *en voyage* he had risked on "poker" money which he did not doubt but would come to him in a lucrative regimental appointment. He complacently met his hotel bill; and, on finding himself baffled at Capetown or Durban, he cheerfully took train to De Aar or Ladysmith, also at his own expense, in the hope of finding commanders at these points with a higher sense of patriotism and broader sympathies.

The result was a small army of unemployed soldiers of fortune were for weeks "grousing" at the tail of each camp, convinced that "those official 'Johnnies' are going to ruin the show," and that "a big succession of Boer victories are inevitable."

I forbear, of course, giving the names of disappointed warriors knocking at

the doors of staff officers and adding to the wail of the unemployed. But I may observe that in many we found cadets of great houses, and in several instances the bearer of titles. At least one belted earl was in the crowd.

CHAPTER VIII.

Methuen arrives.—Passes De Aar and goes on to Orange River.—I follow.

COLONEL BARTER put the honour of his name as a soldier in the conviction that sooner or later we should have a flying column for the relief of Kimberley. The relief of Kimberley was not originally or primarily an object of Cape Town Castle. I never at the time of the three columns plan heard that the British military authorities were moved by an absorbing passion to release Mr. Cecil Rhodes, nor do I believe that the Boer investment was because of a fierce demand for the great Imperialist's head on a charger.

The fact that the Belmont way should be chosen certainly offered, in Colonel Barter's opinion, the readiest road to Rhodes.

But one Sunday afternoon news was brought me that Lieutenant-General

Lord Methuen with a brilliant staff had passed through De Aar railway station for Orange River. Visions of the Kimberley relief column at once rose before the eye of the jaded mind, and I promptly followed Lord Methuen; my buggy, two horses and black servant on a truck.

The column by which General Lord Methuen decided to relieve Kimberley was designed to embrace the invaluable qualities of swiftness, mobility, and strength. In these particular respects it was to find its nearest historical parallel in the retreat from Cabul to Candahar under Roberts.

The arrival of Lord Methuen at Orange River was quite the event of its day, which happened to be Sunday. Life here had been for several weeks dull, monotonous and easy-going. Col. Kintaid, R.E., united the offices of Camp Commandment and Press Censor. By the one he endeared himself to the little camp. By the other he charmed the Press correspondents, the memories

of De Aar still eating like the proverbial iron into each individual soul in anguish over emasculated or abandoned telegrams.

Orange River promptly buzzed. It became, in a military sense, as filled with energy as Pall Mall itself. There came a swift close to the old golden, leisurely days. The officers of the A.S.C. felt it; the Engineers and the Medical Staff began to move. Troops arrived, and were rapidly forwarded to the north bank of the river.

The formation of the Kimberley flying column had commenced, without doubt; and news of these things reaching De Aar, it brought happiness to Colonel Barter, of the Yorkshire Light Infantry, who for weeks had been sighing for the formation of just such a column to go to the relief of Kimberley. This accession of happiness to the Colonel of the Y.L.I. was additionally gratifying, as that regiment had been detailed for service with Lord Methuen.

In five days the work of preparation

was complete. The expeditionary force or First Division of the army of South Africa was divided into two brigades, known as the Ninth and the Guards. The Ninth was a purely infantry brigade, consisting of portions of the Northumberland Fusiliers, otherwise the "Fighting Fifth;" a wing of the North Lancashires, which had a couple of companies under Colonel Plumer at Kimberley; some of the Manchesters, the Yorkshires, and the Northamptonshire Regiment, which was one of the corps so roughly handled at Majuba Hill, and whose survivors now openly exacted as reprisals five Boers for every Northamptonshire slain under Colley.

The Guards Brigade consisted of the Scots Guards—a magnificent regiment, I thought, as, 1,100 strong, it swung, after detraining, across the *campus martius* of Orange River; two battalions of the Coldstreams, and one battalion of the Grenadiers. To this brigade was also attached the Naval Brigade. The construction of the column, as a

whole, was completed by a screen of cavalry, formed of a couple of squadrons of the 9th Lancers, as well as by "bits" of artillery, "bits" of the Engineers, "bits" of the A.S.C., "bits" of the Army Medical Corps, and miscellaneous draughts, mobilising altogether up to some 9,000 men.

To secure the lightness as well as the swiftness of the column, Lord Methuen issued stringent orders with regard to baggage, stores, and camp equipment. There should be no tents; each officer must reconcile himself to a single blanket. The General himself had pleasure in proving his own Spartan spirit of self-sacrifice by pointing to a Brazilian poncho as his only protection against the night chills of the open veldt.

Comforts of all kinds, almost down to a toothpick, were tabooed. Upon the Press correspondents, of whom only eight were directly attached to the column, these restrictions bore with particular keenness. Two men

were to divide one horse between them, using it purely as a "pack animal." There should be no servants, no tents, no camp kettles, no beds, no baggage, no boxes of specially tinned stuffs. Temperance was passively enforced by the absence of anything to break it with.

But the correspondents did not complain. They were only too glad to have been attached at all. Originally, Lord Methuen's idea was to limit the Press contingent to three individuals; but the manifest wrong-doing of such an instance of exclusive dealing was vigorously brought to his lordship's notice, with the result that four correspondents were attached to each brigade, while a number of others were permitted, after a lapse of a week, to go up to Modder River by rail.

"And, gentlemen, believe me," said Major Streatfield, "you will have the best of it. You will be able to shave in comfort."

Finally, Lord Methuen ordered that

the advance of the column should begin in the night.

Accordingly, as the flickering embers of day subsided into an African night tents were struck, and correspondents ambled in, two with one horse, carrying their blankets and coats between them. Yet, though midnight found the column standing to arms, waiting for the order to arrive, that order did not come. The moon rose about 2 a.m., shedding a soft, wistful, inquiring light upon the sympathetic scene, almost asking, "What do ye there?" as she at the same time cast about us a thin but very perceptible vestment of grey damp.

We who had been lying upon the veldt, our heads resting haply upon a spare saddlebag, or upon one of the wonderful anthills peculiar to the country, became aware of a feverish, noisome smell from the poisonous camp; and this miasma, assisted by exposure, bad water and an absolute lack of food, quickly found expression in the usual way.

About 3 o'clock a camp fire here and another there began to blaze, and men cast about for coffee, which, alas! was only too scarce. We whistled for the first gleam of dawn, and, as we looked, a wily old Colonial campaigner crossed the sky-line upon his horse, which, cantering cautiously upon a ridge, reminded one of a cat moving along the tiles. This intrepid sinner had given a fig for Lord Methuen's "one horse, two men" order. Just behind his own thoroughbred came two servants, with the baggage strapped upon a spare horse.

This incident set us conscientious scribes thinking, and the thoughts took the road to the conclusion that we Londoners are too honest for the tented field and the marquee of a modern General of Division.

CHAPTER IX.

We March At Last.

At last the eastern sky broke into streaks of grey, flushing into crimson; and then flashes of gold heralded the business-like ascent of the sun.

But although the scene underwent a spirited change in a few seconds, though the erstwhile silent calm began to move with life and expectation, not a drum was heard nor a bugle note. Indeed, from the camp at Orange River village to Magersfontein no one can remember to have heard a single bugle-call—either reveillé, the beautiful "Come home, come home" of the end of the day, or the inspiriting call for the charge, or the more melancholy retreat. The fact is, this silence of the bugle must be attributed to the grand scheme of censorship against "giving information to the enemy!"

The column, with its trail of ammu-

nition and commissariat waggons, each, again, with its ten span of mules, covered seven miles when formed up into line. The first of the brigades to move were the Guards and cavalry and artillery. The Ninth followed, General Lord Methuen, with Colonel Mainwaring and Major Streatfield, inspecting each regiment as it went steadily forward.

The road lay through a chain of kopjes (pronounced "koppies"), from which we almost instinctively looked for a rattling discharge of Boer shell and rifle fire. Indeed, in this case—as in several others very fresh in my mind—the Boers seem to have missed their opportunity. But the squads of Rimington Guides, which had kept Lord Methuen well informed as to the "location" of the enemy, had cheered us on this point.

Steadily the sun, gaining power, bathed the brown stone kopjes in rose-pink, which paling into burnished gold, the march settled into an ideal hot

African morning; and as the sun rose higher the march grew heavier and the pace slower. Still we pushed forward. The road spanned into some fourteen miles, portions of it over kopjes and rough. It was innocent of water, even almost of the ruggedest vegetation; and it presented the very incarnation of the spirit of desolation.

I may be permitted to digress at this point, just to mention the monotony of desolation through which in South Africa at this side for over hundreds of leagues the traveller passes on his way north. If any reader believes that the hinterland of Cape Colony is a region teeming with grass and lowing kine, let him banish the illusion. From the ourskirts of Capetown up to the most advanced point reached by Methuen's expedition—some seven hundred miles—nothing meets the eye but kopje, and scrub growing upon yellow sand, parched and dry. Of grass there is really none. It is said that when the Dutch were driven out of Cape

Colony and trekked north they pointed to the sleek and prosperous herds of antelope, and argued that where antelope throve sheep and cattle would thrive also. They were right. Here is, indeed, a paradise for the sheep-breeder. I have looked betimes upon a flock a thousand strong, and I have seen it shepherded, too, by a single Kaffir and his wife.

As arranged by Lord Methuen, the column reached a point half-way between Orange River and Belmont, known as Fincham's Farm, where there is a wonderful supply of subterranean water, which makes its way southward until it finds an outlet into the Orange River, coming to the surface by the aid of the wind pump, as clear as crystal. But it is like all the veldt waters of South Africa—it is damned! It is full of poison (evil gases in this particular case); but thirsty men inquire not too curiously. They drink long and heartily, and thankfully withal.

The stay at Fincham's Farm was of

short duration, and next day the camp moved on to Thomas's Farm.

Lord Methuen had learnt that the Boers were lying amongst the Belmont kopjes in force; and he had resolved to give them battle. Thomas's Farm possessed water and other attractions, being also only two miles from the intended point of attack. Our men were in splendid form after their first night on the veldt; but unfortunately, as it so often happens on a British campaign, there was a weird absence of food.

I was attached to the mess of the Colonel and officers of the Grenadier Guards, but I found little to eat here, though abundance of cheery hopefulness. We all suffered, of course, from the proverbial delays of the transport.

The next move forward was at dusk. The "paper" plan of campaign, as it had been drawn up by the General, provided for attack upon a chain of kopjes; but one kopje was left out of

the plan, for a reason known privately to someone.

The troops, with their haversacks empty, moved heartily enough away from Thomas's Farm—to give the camp a generic name. The men had been ordered to fill their water-bottles, as a substitute for food, the ration waggons not having come up even at that late hour of the day. Methuen also gave permission to the men to leave their great-coats behind, which order, in spite of the prospect of some ague fits in the night, was hailed with a half cheer of satisfaction—for even cheering was prohibited, like the use of the bugle, or the slightest allusion to the campaign by the correspondents sent out to talk of nothing else.

The force bivouacked on the plain in front of the position to be attacked. Belmont rests at the feet of a chain of kopjes—a double chain in reality, which winds beside a narrow valley. It offers a sinister position to the assailant, who is promptly placed between two fires.

There was absolutely no cover, and the position chosen for the bivouac admitted of a long frontal advance, exposed to such artillery or shell and rifle fire as the Boers, splendidly fixed up in their natural entrenchments, might have to offer our fellows.

It was an ideal surprise night, calm and dark. Now, the success of the enterprise papered out depended upon a few simple conditions. First, unity of action—movement before daybreak, so that the murder-inviting distance to be covered between the bivouac and the point of assault might be attended with the minimum of risk to the British; and, finally, alacrity of the cavalry and the artillery in getting into action.

Unfortunately, little happened as by common sense it was designed. To begin with, the advance was not made until the sun had begun to flood the plain with its search-light. Hence the chance of the Boers being surprised was hopelessly at an end.

Nevertheless, with a pull at their water-bottles and a cheery word from their colonels, the men pushed manfully for whatever waited the Brigade, which in this case may be said to have been the whole of Methuen's force. Stay—a word of interrogation.

Where was the artillery? What had become of the guns? By this time the sound of shot and shrapnel clearing the kopjes was awaited—and awaited in vain. Not that this delayed the advance.

A death-like silence hung over all. Nothing was to be heard but the swish, swish in measured cadence of the feet of the soldiery as they brushed through the low bush. An order was issued by the commanders of battalions to "Withhold fire and attack with the bayonet." The 8,000 infantry pushed on, the morning light growing stronger each moment, and still the Boers were silent in their trenches, and our artillery refrained from speaking out either.

We had still about three hundred

yards to move when a rattle of cannon spoke the arrival of the artillery, and a minute later the guns opened with shrapnel upon a kopje.

Meanwhile the Infantry Brigade redoubled their pace, fixing bayonets with the familiar ring as they surged forward. It was now that the Boers disclosed themselves with a murderous wave of fire. The Northumberlands had made, as ordered, for the left flank of the kopje, but "something happened" by which complete co-operation with the Guards was frustrated. The "something" belongs to the Grenadiers, which, like the Queen of the ballet, spoiled the figure, with the pouting rejoinder, "You all were wrong, I only was right."

Now, it will be noticed that in each of the first positions attacked artillery had played no part whatever. Not a shell was fired to either clear the trenches or test the strength of the enemy. Our brave fellows, in a sense, went bald-headed for the now flaming

bastions of stone and steel. The fire was murderous. The front rank men of the Grenadiers, the Scots Guards, and the "Fighting Fifth" went down in the proportion of two out of three. But if the fire was hot, so was the pace. Our men, deployed to the right, reached the kopjes, and, rushing up, literally caught the enemy as in a series of rabbit hutches, bayoneting everyone seen to be using his Mauser rifle. Some of the Boers were so securely "packed" that it was necessary to prod and dig them out with the bayonet. Others, again, were pulled out by the collar, but—with a chivalry that cannot be too highly extolled, considering the circumstances and the provocation—the British linesmen refrained from putting the bayonet into these skunks.

The Boers were guilty of miserable truculence. In one case a Dutchman shot an officer while he himself lay wounded. Another, ensconced in a kind of stone barbette, unseen, discharged his rifle into the face of a young

officer, blowing the jaw quite away. He was rewarded and the officer avenged by a sergeant, who bayoneted the Boer where he sat.

Meanwhile, everything had been going on gloriously just as it was not intended to go. The Grenadiers which moved to the attack of the excluded kopje found it, contrary both to expectation and shell fire, very much alive, while the intervening hill had to be carried by a frontal attack. At a distance what we saw seemed to be a number of little brown balls rolling up a hill, but nearer, I need scarcely say, the brown balls expanded into British Guardsmen in khaki dress. All this time the artillery had been making up for lost opportunity by pouring in tons of shot and shell. By some oversight in the plan of campaign, little place was assigned to the Naval Brigade, excepting to so place them that they came in for all the superfluous energy or otherwise unbilleted bullets of the Boer defence. I ought to mention the excess

of gallantry displayed by some general officers along the line of fire.

One of the two brigades was thrown into semi-disorder for a few moments at a most critical period by a brigadier commanding dashing up and down the fighting line, attended by his aide-de-camp, the Brigade Major, and an orderly. He drew a double dose of firing upon the brigade, which was thrown into confusion, and in the midst of the noise a Northern voice from the ranks was heard calling to the intrepid general: "—— thee! Get thee to ——, and let's fire." This exactly hit the situation. The line dared not fire, from a fear of killing its own General.

Lord Methuen's own account of the disposition of his troops shows that he designed a flank attack, and the force, he adds, marched off "silently and correct." In the darkness, or semi-darkness, however, as General Colville, the general commanding the Guards' Brigade, told Lord Methuen, the

Grenadiers "lost direction," which converted an intended flank into a frontal attack. The Ninth Brigade, which consisted of regiments of the Line, such as the Northumberlands, the Yorkshire Light Infantry, the Northamptons, were ordered to "conform to Guards," and, having gained the first ridge, to wait until the guns shrapnelled the second line of heights.

Lord Methuen claims this to have been a "complete surprise" for the Boers, as they did not know he had moved from Witte Putt; but I think this does discredit to the prying proclivities of the Boers, who had all along followed, dodged, and known our intentions as well as our movements.

Lord Methuen claims, also, to have averted half of what would have been his losses if the Brigade had delayed its march; but all the same, the Boers were cognisant of the advance, which was made in the half light of the dawn. The brown of the veldt helped, by harmony of colour, to conceal the

khaki of the British lines. Lieut.-Colonel Crabbe and Lieut. Blundell, who were gallantly leading, were shot down by a wounded Boer, who paid a bayonet penalty for his expiatory patriotism. The Scots Guards carried the position assigned them at the point of the bayonet, and in doing so, I repeat, they had almost to pick out the Boers wedged behind boulders upon the points of their bayonets.

The General pays due credit to the bravery of Colonel Paget, his regiment being left entirely to its own resources, the result of the situation created by the earlier blunder. Lieut.-Colonel Pulteney, Lieut. Bulkeley, and Lieut. Alexander are also mentioned in despatches. But in paying tribute to the courage and coolness of Colonel Codrington, of the Coldstream Guards; to Captain Fielding, Lieut. the Hon. C. Douglas Pennant, and Lieut. Pryce Jones; to Major the Hon. A. Henniker, and Major Shute, the General has to revert to the overthrowing of his plan,

which the Yorkshires, the Northumberlands, and the Northamptons, with the artillery, did their best to retrieve.

I fully support Gen. Lord Methuen in his complaint of the want of more cavalry and artillery, which explains the racy escape of the Boers, who, fugitives from the kopjes we had attacked, reached their ponies and galloped cheerily off. Apart from the errors of the colonels and the deviation from the plan, the battle of Belmont, in spite also of the escape of the main Boer force, was a distinct success. We destroyed the Boer laager, and captured many horses and some prisoners. Apropos of the latter, these prisoners, by an adroit movement, we tapped for such information as they could or would disclose. Two sham prisoners, handcuffed, were seated on the ground, and to these the genuine captives were brought. "All 's fair in love and war," and so decoy-duck prisoners may be left to prey upon the real captive.

At the sight of cold steel the Boers literally turned and fled, carrying their dead and wounded. How they succeeded in doing this forms one of the athletic features of this many-sided campaign. Some of the dead or dying were stuffed away into deftly-constructed utility graves and cupboards of stone on the kopjes. Here our fellows found quite a dozen. Thus the Boers successfully concealed the number of their losses in the field.

I joined some officers at the summit of one of the kopjes we had carried at the point of the bayonet, and without the aid of previous shell fire. As we stood watching the enemy stubbornly potting the cavalry, a Boer, mounted on a cream-coloured Basuto pony with light-buff harness, trotted watchfully beneath, spotting a way through the cavalry screen. Major Earle—I think it was—shouted to the fellow to halt. He looked our way for just one instant, and then digging in his spurs got into a savage gallop, and, as I vow, escaped,

though peppered at by half a regiment. Just as the plucky rascal found his opening he turned cheerfully in his saddle, and putting the thumb of a disengaged hand to his nose, distended his fingers into a fan. We could not help laughing at the audacity of the movement, and I am more than half persuaded that this Republican chevalier was much nearer to an Englishman, or, peradventure, to one of Mr. ——'s Celtic mercenaries.

CHAPTER X.

After the Battle.—Terrible Scenes.

Both the artillery and the Lancers followed the now flying Boers; but the former did poor execution, and the Lancers unfortunately outspanned into an arc too large for the purpose of the hour. I went back to the veldt under a dropping fire of "cloop, cloop" Boer guns, some of which caused the ground to spurt into little sand "devils," to use a local phrase.

The ambulance was now at work, and the wounded, who with the dead and the dying numbered some scores, were being hurried to Thomas's Farm, where the farmhouse had been commandeered as a field hospital. The waggons and the stretchers and the bearers were all equal to the work before them. I found myself in front of the kopje first stormed, and here our gallant fellows lay about as thickly

as nomads in the Green Park on a summer day. Some attempt had been made to separate the living from the dead, and I thus counted a row of seven linesmen who were destined never to fall in at morning parade again.

The Boer rifles appeared to have got in chiefly in the abdomen and the lower limbs. The khaki was dyed so deeply with crimson that some of the dead and wounded must have received more than half a dozen shots. Indeed, it was frequently discovered through the campaign, notably in the case of officers, that they had been hit five or six times. This proves, I think, that in spite of the order removing badges and other marks of rank, the keen-eyed enemy is able to spot and pot his officer. Several of the wounded also were hit in the spine—the result, as it was explained to me, of the cross-fire between two of the unshelled kopjes.

I met with only one soldier shot in the face, and he presented a truly

ghastly spectacle, as with his hands he tried to staunch his wound. His face and hands, arms and breast, were literally bathed in gore. The law of the ambulance provided that a man so wounded should be laid upon his back, and what these poor fellows suffered under the fierce glare of the sun, now well up, as well as from the myriads of horse-flies which had accompanied the column from Orange River, no one can ever know.

The living and the unwounded who stood helplessly about were very silent, and this made very noticeable the sharp, short, stertorous breathing of a Grenadier, who will never again attend perambulative beauty in Hyde Park.

"How he sleeps!" said a Northampton to me.

"Sleep! That, my dear fellow, is not sleep, except on the doorstep of death. It is the death-rattle!"

There seemed something terribly weird in this disclosure, for the whole of these honest fellows really believed the

wounded man was peacefully snoring. One by one they moved out of earshot, and very shortly the doomed soldier gave a convulsive start, and his career had closed. The cessation of what now had become an appalling premonition of dissolution really produced a feeling of genuine relief. The survivors grew quite cheerful, for the circumstances, and we soon had reminiscences of the battle sufficient to fill a volume.

As I moved to the right, striking a rather deserted part of the field, I became aware of a brown clump of something in the bush. I moved aside to see, and the "something" turned out to be a private of the Scots Guards. He was quite dead. Lying huddled upon his left side, his head dipped towards his breast, his hand on the breech of his rifle, he had evidently been mortally hit as he was himself in the act of preparing to perform a similar service for one of the Queen's enemies. He lay so quietly and so

easily, and was so free from the crimson evidence of pain, that it seemed a pity to move him, and I passed on to send a stretcher back.

Coming upon a group of Kaffir muleteers, I looked upon a dead Boer, the companion picture to the other, and its set-off in a sense. He was a Free Stater, and seemed to be known to the bystanders as a farmer, married and with a family. He was well dressed and neatly kemped; but the green pallor of his face and the eyes glazed in a painful death contrasted with the faint smile that disclosed good teeth. Two brothers of the "Fighting Fifth" lay on the ground together. Each had been wounded in the thigh, a sufficiently remarkable coincidence even for the experiences of war.

I had brought with me from Fincham's Farm half a dozen gin bottles filled with artificial iced-water. I distributed it amongst the dying and the wounded. To the former it brought alleviation of death, and to the others

a revival of strength and hope. Never, indeed, have I seen gratitude and surprise more touchingly expressed by the human eye. I remember the words of a Grenadier, who said: "I was so exhausted going up that kopje that I did not believe my lungs would hold together for the top. Yet, when the regiment got to the top we all of us found breath enough to give three cheers for the Queen." This is characteristic of the British soldier.

The regimental chaplains, like the field surgeons, won eulogiums by their bravery in attending the wounded and the dying. I was especially struck by a representative of the London Missionary Society attached to the Fusiliers.

Someone, a non-belligerent, remarked to one of Colonel Money's sergeants:

"Well, you've had some fun this morning?"

"Fun, you call it," replied the man, a Northumbrian. "Look here, sir! My regiment has never experienced

such a hot corner as that in which we fought for our lives for two hours."

The battle of Belmont lasted about six hours, and terminated in our driving off the Boers, but the price paid for our victory was excessive.

On our side the engagement was marked by the hurling of great masses of British troops at stone bastions from which a continuous belt of fire came with literally murderous effect. It was, of course, glorious; but it was not war —albeit Boer war. For we never got even a glimpse of the fiends behind that ring fence of hidden fire.

British soldiers were killed by shots whose place of origin they had been unable to fix. Officers were maimed by a foe they could not see. It was only when the Boers were driven out of their rude fortresses that we had ocular evidence of the existence of a living foe at all. It was only as prisoners that they could be clearly observed.

There was a small group mixed up

with our wounded. They were unmistakably of the agricultural class, and one marvelled, indeed, that these lean, shaggy fellows, dressed anyhow, should have had the audacity to stand up against a British army. But Belmont proved that our generals had yet to learn the elementary rules of the game of war as she is known and studied in the Transvaal homesteads.

We had lost heavily—fifty-nine killed, one hundred and forty-eight wounded, and eighteen missing. Captain Eager, of the Northumberlands, and Lieutenant Brine, of the same regiment, were killed. General Featherstonhaugh, Lieutenant-Colonel Crabbe, 3rd Grenadiers; Major Dalrymple Hamilton, 1st Scots; and Lieut. Willoughby, 2nd Coldstreams, were wounded.

CHAPTER XI.

How the Boers Fight.—Curious Customs.

It was, I remember, a complaint of the captured Boers at Belmont that the general whom they expected did not turn up. This, I believe, was none other than Cronje himself. But if they were disappointed, we were surprised by the numbers of the Boers in the kopjes, and we were handicapped as much by officers who forgot their orders as by the lack of sufficient artillery as well as of mounted men.

The Boers go into action with a free hand. The only discipline which they observe is the discipline of obeying the initial order of their Commando. A batch are instructed to occupy a given kopje. They occupy it; but once here, every man is a general unto himself. He selects his own cover, usually behind a boulder, upon which he rests

the barrel of his Mauser and, addressing it to the advancing foe, empties the magazine in the feeling, more pious than logical, that every bullet must find its billet in the hated English.

The Boers are mounted infantry in the best sense—alive, alert, capable of almost instantaneous mobility. They ride to the field of intended or expected action upon Basuto ponies, the best light cavalry cob in the world, and while crawling into their rock-bound holes the men picket their horses in safe but handy cover, usually in the charge of a comrade or two. The fighting line, enjoying its freedom from direct control, may fight as it likes, as long as it likes, and may run away when it likes.

As a matter of fact, derived from personal observation as well as from statistical proportions, the Boers as a whole are no better than our own soldiers behind a rifle. They are not in one view so good. Their fire is always at an advantage. The Boers

are safely ensconced behind a boulder, every Mauser resting upon a rock.

Themselves invisible, they see advancing in the open two or there battalions, fair objects of attack. It seems to be the most natural thing in the world to mow down the British troops, and yet, when all is done and the battle ends, the "butcher's bill" is found, happily, below the Boer opportunities for slaughter. The explanation is found, I think, in the double Boer infirmities of want of nerve and lack of rifle practice. Men that can kill a springbuck at 400 yards, find their hands shake when the buck is a man that has to be shot. It is a kind of pious nervousness this, springing from a God-fearing, Bible-reading, prayer-meeting nation of yeomen.

In these latter days of Transvaal wealth, and, consequently, of luxury, the young "braves" of the Republic have abandoned many of the Spartan pleasures of their still living fathers.

One curious custom, indicating the

love of prize winning without the trouble of rifle practice, is found in the habit of competitors engaging professional champions to shoot for them; the rewards of the champions being in proportion to the measure of their success at the butts.

But the effect of such vicarial marksmanship upon the youth of the Transvaal is obvious, and, happily, is seen in a relatively merciful influence upon our columns. No doubt the slaughter and wounding at Magersfontein were terrible, but then the situation created at Magersfontein was a phenomenal one. The Boers had no alternative choice. They could but kill or maim by the mere automatic discharging of their guns at the hustling crowd of human deer impaled upon Cronje's wicked barbed wire.

CHAPTER XII.

The Battle of Graspan.

But Lord Methuen, well satisfied with his performance at Belmont, thirsted for yet more victories. Accordingly, after spending the night round Thomas's Farm, the troops were ordered to be ready to move in a few hours. Before nightfall that day, not a living relic remained of the first great encampment.

The road to Graspan was over rising ground, quite waterless and so far exhausting, but otherwise presenting no features uncommon to the land for six hundred miles behind us. It was a march of about ten miles, but, fortunately, the ration waggons had come up before we left Thomas's, and so hunger—the result of customary traditional army bungling—was no longer a bar to our men's progress.

After some five hours' marching we reached a ridge from which we could

see the plain of Enslin, intended for our encampment. This lay about five miles below us, but in that wondrous clear air it seemed scarcely a mile away. To the right swept an intervening chain of sinister-looking kopjes, and these, our scouts informed us, harboured a strong force of Boers. Before descending the northern slope of the ridge where we stood, Lord Methuen ordered a field hospital to be established, in view of eventualities. As time proved, it was a timely order, too. Deploying to the right, the entire force now moved towards the Boer position, which the artillery shelled as a prelude to real business. As a matter of fact, alas! the real business, as our experience taught us, consisted in shelling the Boer position.

Remembering how the Naval Brigade had been overlooked at Belmont, where, indeed, it had lain to be seasoned into wild irritation by "Mauser" peppercorns, the General now accorded these valiant coadjutors of the line a premier

place. Picking out a kopje for their negotiation, Lord Methuen ordered the hill first to be well shelled. For half an hour that kopje was treated to a heavy fire of shrapnel, and one of the Maxims of the Guards was turned upon the lower range of the front and flank. Not a reply did we draw. No guns retorted; not a flying Boer was to be made out. So Lord Methuen, as any other observer might have been excused for doing, concluded that the hill was really unoccupied. Admitting this, he added: "However, let the Naval Brigade advance and occupy the position," which, no doubt, had a "key" value.

The abortive shelling of the kopjes at Graspan is explained, of course, by the Boers having dexterously avoided the fire by getting to the other side of the hill. Here they lay unseen, rightly anticipating the infantry attack, and waiting with cynical patience for its opening. A manœuvre of the kind would probably explain the silence of their artillery at Magersfontein, until it

suited them to speak out. Boers, as I have said, are permitted to take up such positions as they choose. In kopje fighting, some of them burrow into the hill, others nimbly create for themselves miniature fortresses by means of handy boulders. But to the Naval Brigade.

Then a strange thing happened. From the top and the higher range and flanks of the kopje, a murderous fire was poured upon our seamen, so hot that the Staff were horrified to see the front rank going down in the proportion of two men to three. "Retire upon your last cover," was the order quickly given and carried out. But the Boer fire continued, and, indeed, increased, until it really looked as if the entire kopje was in a condition of eruption. The shower of bullets was so lively and persistent, that the Naval Brigade was rendered invisible in the cloud of sand it threw up. Again the order rang out: "Men of the Naval Brigade, advance at the double; take that kopje and be hanged to it!" It

was Commander Protheroe's last order that day, for a bullet silenced him.

Meantime the Naval Brigade pushed gallantly, fearlessly on, running as only British bluejackets can run when there is an enemy ahead. The Boers wavered; and as the sailor assault reached the base of the kopje, and our fellows rushed up with a rousing cheer, in spite of the murderous fire from cranny and human rat-hole, the heart leaped with admiration at this display of British pluck. In a few seconds the Naval Brigade was at the top of the kopje, which it hailed with three rousing cheers. But I agree with a friend and colleague of the service in question, that the Naval Brigade ought not to have been used for such an attack. But the victory was complete. We expected to fight 800 Boers. We met 3,000. Lord Methuen took his largest batch of prisoners, and with more mounted men and guns he might have bagged the lot, or nearly so.

Lord Methuen lodged at Enslin, in a

farmhouse nicely enclosed in a garden. Indeed, the headquarters staff appeared to make its camp selections where a farmhouse came in handy. Well, I am obliged to say I appreciate the preference for stone walls to the blue ether of the open veldt; and if our General had not so far found it useful to resort to his poncho—well, all the better for the poncho. The camp was neither better nor worse than the camps we had passed through. The weather was exhaustingly hot, and the troops found refuge from it difficult.

He had now fought two battles in three days, but, so far as I could learn, without our generals deciding upon a less expensive policy of attack. A cynic remarked: "It seems to be the habit of our commanding officers to find out the strongest position of the enemy and then to attack him in front." This jest, with its veneer of hard truth, was turned by the Colonel of one of our battalions of Guards with the remark: "It appears to me we attack

the enemy first and then find out his position." The laugh was about equal anyway, and in a subtle manner betrayed a wide appreciation of any flout at the kind of genius sent to watch over us and, all things going well, restore us to our homes.

But the habit of throwing men blindly at entrenched positions without regard to shell as a preliminary cleanser was not persevered with. Tommy Atkins had not, so far, begun to criticise his generals, but that might come at any moment. The men took their orders, made straight for the position to be carried, and, in spite of tremendous losses, succeeded in doing what they were told to do. Then, recking nothing of hunger, or even asking when the ration waggons might be expected, they lay down, if regimental duty permitted, and went straight to sleep. Let no one say the British linesman is not a man. For his courage and reserve force he is unquestionably the finest soldier in the world.

CHAPTER XIII.

How the Officers and Men Fared.—Social Aspects of the Camp.

THE transport all this time distinguished itself upon traditionary lines, and by all those delays associated with the progress of the law and the pleasure of obtaining justice. Commanders of regiments had made due provision for their comfort while in camp, and for doing honour to the proverbial hospitality of private English gentlemen. Cases of whisky, cases of brandy, cases of champagne, cases of sherry, and cases of liqueurs, with boxes of such delicacies as "the Stores" provide for lunch or breakfast, and even dinner *al fresco*, were brought out from England, and when heaped together would have made a kopje of themselves.

But these treasures of foresight, partly through the vicissitudes of the railway transport and partly by the

necessity of using the baggage train for ammunition, field rations, and for reinforcements, were long in getting to the front. Colonels waited and swore. The transport did not help the prevalent distress. Over and over again the troops had to draw their rations long after they should have been asleep, preparatory to the battle of the morrow. Officers fared no better, even though each mess was accompanied by the regimental cook. Some of these cooks were French *chefs*, holding great certificates as experts in *plats* for the epicure. One or two made wonderful *entrees* of bully beef. But the army was badly equipped as a whole in those finer accomplishments of the prepared foods manufacturers. No doubt Woolwich had done its duty; but what had become of those choicer devices of the canned meat provider, no one had succeeded in discovering to the last day of my stay in Lord Methuen's camp.

Nevertheless, both officers and men took their lot cheerfully. The army

was without tents; but the men and officers had brought a strip of black calico, which, supported lengthwise upon a couple of rifles plugged into the ground, afforded an ingenious if slender protection against the sun. Against the cold or the rain of the long night there was of course no such protection. Thus the appearance of the camp by daylight was that of a great gipsy encampment, where similar shelter, but on more extended and serviceable lines, suffices for the English Bedouin.

As a rule camp life under Lord Methuen was not distinguished by hilarity. The beat of a drum was seldom heard, and no man should raise his voice in song lest it attract the foe. "We sleep with the enemy about us," said Major Streatfield. The marches were not long; but they proved, under the great day sun, exhausting enough. Men thus became almost too tired to eat, and the younger officers would throw themselves under their hastily raised screens in every attitude of

picturesque languor. The sun after Orange River sank about half-past seven, then supreme darkness fell upon the land; all camp fires were extinguished; and the troops submitted themselves to sleep and the watchful care of the sentries. But there was little reason to fear a night attack. I have often thought, what would have happened to a British force in Eastern campaigns if the enemy only fought at night? If the Khalifa had attacked us at Omdurman under cover of darkness, Lord Kitchener might now have been a Dervish prisoner instead of the rising hope of the British nation in South Africa.

But as Lord Methuen was fond of night attacks, or night marches for assaults at dawn, his forces found the early close of day none too soon. In time, however, they came to know their General. They grew cunningly aware that while he ordered the camp to be ready to march before the dawn, the order to march was seldom given so early. Lord Methuen believed in night

advances, but he had no love, perhaps, for the inconvenience which attended them. Personally, I do not believe that.

Anyone who is acquainted with the habits of foreign armies in the field, who has studied the wars of Wellington, of Napoleon, of Napier, could not have failed to observe a certain looseness in our camp management. There was an absurd contempt for the enemy on the part of the headquarters staff, and an indifference, most pronounced, to his whereabouts and strength. At Graspan, Lord Methuen expected a brush with 800 Boers. He encountered over 3000 of the enemy. But this taught no lesson, until we became almost like the courtiers of King Louis, who neither learned anything nor forgot anything. What our officers could not or would not forget was their prejudice against the fighting potentialities of the foe. Every kopje was an argus of Boer eyes, and yet, because it looked so lonely and was so silent under the fierce rays of the sun, its

deserted condition was never doubted. The plan of campaign was to march fifteen miles, go to bed, wake at sunrise, fight the enemy, then march back to camp preparatory to another advance and another battle. This grew dolorously monotonous, until the prospect of being wounded afforded a pleasant vision of release. The value of the Victoria Cross threatened to fall below that of the Indian rupee or the Mexican dollar, in consequence of the number of claimants to it.

"Why," asked a sergeant of the Guards "are we like the early Christians?"

"Because 'Paul' gives our feet much to do."

Lord Methuen in his official reports has spoken with some bitterness of the defective scouting, and for this he has blamed both his own cavalry and the Colonial irregular troops.

Rimington's Guides have been mainly employed on the Western border, in concert with the Cape Mounted Police,

in this work, and a few words as to this regiment may prove interesting.

Rimington's Scouts, who have been a good deal to the front, form a force of irregular horse and are used as guides. It is a condition of service that each man should be able to act as a guide to the whole—that is to say, he must know with an expert knowledge some piece of territory, so that in any emergency where all are at fault but one, rescue should be afforded. The men wear khaki with a raffish wide-awake, bordered with a strip of tiger-skin. This adornment has caused the Corps to be known as "Rimington's Tigers." Major Rimington, who organised these scouts, is a British cavalry officer and a fine dashing fellow. But Boer cunning on the Kimberley route proved too sharp for any scouts, and hence our "surprises" at Modder River and Magersfontein.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Battle of the Century.

HAVING lain at Enslin over Sunday, we had orders to march at sunrise. I dined with the officers of the Grenadier Guards, our banquet eaten standing or at roughly improvised benches, and from seats found at the edge of a water-can or the corner of a biscuit-box. It consisted of some black liquid called soup, followed by stewed steak, with compressed ration vegetables, the hardest biscuit on earth, and the whole was relieved with a dreadful variety of the ration cocoa. But our Colonel; Count Gleichen, and their brother officers ate like men who enjoyed the viands as if they had been at the choicest restaurant in England.

Night had now fallen, and an adventure befell my efforts to find my own laager. I had picketed my horses but

a little way off, and my servant with the cart was there also.

The darkness was impenetrable, and as any shouting for my servant would have been misunderstood in camp, and might have brought out the guard, I was precluded from seeking guidance in that form. Indeed, the camp now, with all lights out, was as invisible as if it had no existence. So I sat down to think, and took to studying certain stars in relation to where the sun had gone down, and in this way got my bearings, approximately at all events. Next I fixed the latitude of my laager in relation to the Guards' encampment and the time it had taken me to cover the intervening distance. So, putting visible stars with invisible sun, and getting, as nearly as I could, the Guards' camp at my back, I walked towards where I concluded the railway track must be. In a very few moments I fell over something which my hands told me was a bag of forage, and then, looking upwards, saw in a dull way

something white overhead. At the same time a long snore cut into the silence of the night, followed by the movement of a horse's foot. In another second I discovered that this was my laager, the white thing overhead being the canvas hood of my cart, the sounds on the ground emanating from the peaceful slumbers of my Basuto servant.

All the time I sat working out my position by "dead reckoning" I was almost within arm's-length of my desert home.

Before the sun had done more than flush the eastern horizon with its familiar lines of gold and crimson the camp was astir, and at 4.30 scarcely a soldier was to be seen where 9,000 had been. The march was to be of the average fourteen miles, mainly along the railway line. It was, in fact, along the old Dutch road across the veldt, and the fact of our railway engineers having traced their own course thereby speaks well for the early Boer as an engineer. He accomplished the conquest of distance by adopting the

shortest road, which was the road straight ahead. The first of the troops to march were my old regiment, the Grenadier Guards, who obtained once more the post of honour in the vanguard of the army.

On our march to Klopfontein, eight miles from Modder River, we passed a farm and a store which had been completely wrecked and looted by the Boers in their flight from Graspan. Lord Methuen would not sanction any rest, even to replenish exhausted water-bottles, so we pushed on until noon. Then occurred what at first sight might have been mistaken for a mirage. The vision of water turned out on near approach to consist of a series of spacious ponds, the water of which, unfortunately, became too muddy to drink with comfort. Nevertheless, drunk it was. I have, in common with officers and men, tasted worse; indeed, the water at Orange River was repulsive alike to sight and to taste. It was of the colour of the contents of a

chambermaid's bucket; and at another place, whose name I have forgotten, the flavour was distinctly of castor oil. These ponds quickly ran dry, and there remained now nothing drinkable—I use the word in its most extensive and exhaustive form—nearer than Modder River; *i.e.*, "muddy river," an ill-omened name.

Nevertheless, it was clearly not Lord Methuen's intention to hurry himself. Indeed, the word went round that we were to "rest" here all the next day. That seemed, in the face of the water famine and the propinquity of the Modder River, unlikely; and in the course of the afternoon Major ——, who is an old Guardsman, rode over to our brigade with the cheering information that we should breakfast at Modder River.

"We have knowledge," he added, "that the Boers are there in a mere handful, which it will be easy enough to dispose of. Their dispersal across the river will not occupy more than a few minutes."

Now, so much for headquarter information, and the resources of intelligence officers! I, in common with others, have marvelled that the General commanding should have been so inadequately supplied with knowledge which scouting by the merest amateurs at the work could surely have acquired.

What was the fact, for example, about the Boer strength at Modder River? Men spoke with airy lightness of the enemy, implying, indeed, that it was like their cheek to be near the Modder River at all. They should be driven off, however, just as an appetiser for the morning meal of the General and his gallant troops. Yet what happened? What, indeed, was the fact? The handful of Boers holding the river were not a handful, but fully 8,000! Lord Methuen, I believe, has put the number very much higher than that. So far from the position being cleared, it was not cleared after a battle of thirteen hours and a half had been fought, and as for breakfast—well, it

was not eaten at all, and for some score of gallant fellows there was no more breakfast in this world.

So, just before the veldt lark—that pretty black and white bird, with a keen single pipe, and a rattling of its wings like the "tap-tap" of a miniature Maxim—had begun its short ascents, just as the first streak of grey appeared in the eastern sky, the camp was roused. No bugle sounded the call—yet, as if by a whole round of revéillés, the slumbering host sprang to its feet, and as the sun touched the horizon the entire force was on the march.

Between our point of departure and the Modder River, with its refreshing prospect of a restful breakfast and a much-needed bath, there lay but some eight miles. The veldt fell gently before us, as it always does when a river lies ahead, and everyone stepped out cheerily.

Having by a little daring and more circumspection had my cart and horses brought on from Orange River, I drove

discreetly on the flank of the baggage train, and in the rear of the fighting column; but the course which I took for a time gave me a command of the whole line ahead. Indeed, as later events proved, if I had continued to move away from the baggage column I should, in half an hour, have trotted into a large Boer laager, of which Lord Methuen, thanks to his intelligence department, was hopelessly ignorant.

Suddenly a gunshot, and then a second, were heard on our right, and the baggage column, like a startled convoy of five-knot transports, came to a dead stop. Our whole line was now well down towards the river, Lord Methuen's object being to cross at two points—first, with the Ninth Brigade, by way of the drift below the demolished railway bridge; and, secondly, with the Brigade of Guards, at the other end of the village. A cavalry and mounted infantry patrol had been sent along the face of the river, with the village on the left, to "fish" for

the handful of Boers, who, with unconscionable temerity, had occupied a position on the stream. Upon this patrol the Boers—wily dogs—fired; for, without knowing what was running in our minds, they wished to draw Lord Methuen's attention to the centre of their fire. In this they were quite successful, for we believed this to be a mere act of bravado, to be followed by prompt flight; and orders being given to the Ninth Brigade to cross the river, a merry effort was made to dislodge these insolent Dutch who had fired upon our patrol.

Never was ruse, and with it the awakening, more complete. No sooner did the Boer general see that we regarded his attack as a mere child's affair than he disclosed his entire position, and poured shell upon shell into the troops sent to cross the river. To begin with, as I looked at the spot where I had seen the Lancers attacked there was a flash from a building, followed by the "jab-jab" of the Maxims

and a strange "plom-plom." Along the front and to the extreme right of our position flash and shell and Maxim followed each other until we foresaw a big battle.

I got a fire lit on the veldt, and made some tabloid tea, glad enough of it without either milk or sugar, and with a few crumbs of the hardest biscuit ever issued as an army ration. This disposed of, I slowly drew down to the battle-ground. By this time our people had fixed up the strength of the enemy, and fully realised the struggle ahead. The Boers were splendidly entrenched. Their rifle pits were spacious and communicated, while the low stone walls of the various gardens served admirably for artillery.

I ought to explain, for the better understanding of the ground, that Modder River is the Rosherville of Kimberley. It stands on the river, and is equipped with a large hotel. There is a spacious pleasure garden also, with swings and tea-houses and

dining rooms. The houses which extend from this garden, with its numerous and spacious billiard rooms, drinking bars, and private snuggeries, all play their part in the entertainment of Kimberley when it takes to the cooler river.

Every one of these houses now was turned to armed account by the Boers. Windows gave cover for riflemen, and from front and back alike machine guns spoke. Never did a general dispose his men to better advantage than did Cronje, and never did he enjoy better advantages. Lord Methuen, on the other hand, saw clearly that he had underrated his foe, and had not duly considered the defensive possibilities of the Modder River. But this was no time for vain regrets. A big battle must be fought to the bitter end. The Boers meant business. Lord Methuen's cook was in despair, for it was clear now that there would be no breakfast that day. Of this surprise however the General was not the first victim.

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CHAPTER XV.

A Duel between the New Implements of Slaughter.

THE battle, as it developed, became in reality a highly interesting and historic experimental duel in modern weapons of war and of the higher and more scientific grade. It was, in fact, a duel between machine guns. It is the greatest contest of the kind that has occurred since the invention of the Maxim, the Nordenfeldt, the Hotchkiss, and, I may add, the Howitzer. To these must be added our newest field guns and our most terrible variety of shells. It was not, moreover, by any means a one-sided affair, as we found ourselves pitted against a foe quite as well equipped as ourselves. Indeed, in some respects he bettered the instruction.

For one thing, Cronje brought into action a brute beast of a mixed inven-

tion, partly Nordenfeldt and partly Hotchkiss, which showed its prowess early in the day by ruthlessly splitting the Maxim of the Scots Guards, and putting it at once out of action. It went off with a fearful, wonderful noise, jabbing six times, and with a curiously low monotonous sound like "plom, plom." Cronje had twelve field and siege guns of large calibre, and the roar of batteries added to the shrieking and bursting of our shell and shrapnel, the rattle of the Maxims, the measured beat of the Nordenfeldt, and the sinister note of the Boer *chef d'œuvre*, produced with the fusillade of rifle-fire a din never to be forgotten.

Happily for us, the Boer shells had a comforting habit of sinking into the sand without exploding. Indeed, we grew so accustomed to this that we only took precautions against the Maxims and the riflepit fire, which certainly was dangerous enough for the veriest fire-eater. The plan adopted by officers and men alike was to lie flat

on the ground, and in this attitude some hundreds of private soldiers, thoroughly worn out by the heat as well as by exhaustion from want of food, were to be seen fast asleep. Some, I believe, were shot dead as they slept.

That this attitude minimised the danger only partially was shown in the case of one officer, who, having given an order, lay down, and was promptly shot dead. Major Reid, an Intelligence officer, was upon his left side when a shot struck his jack-knife, which turned it, but the pressure upon the knife produced a severe contusion of the flesh and bone of the right hip, amounting in every sense to a wound. However, Major Reid gallantly remained in action. Indeed, the Boers pushed the pace so hard that they declined to allow our wounded, lying under fire, to be removed, and they fired upon ambulance waggons and stretcher-bearers alike.

Too much praise cannot be given to the successive batteries of artillery who remained exposed throughout the day,

not only to the deadly fire of the Boer cannon, but to the raking of the Boer riflepits and entrenchments. Upon our guns Cronje directed all his artillery force.

The field for us was badly positioned. It rose slightly from the Boer entrenchments, which were at both sides of the river, thus placing our men at a terrible disadvantage. It afforded but slight cover. Here and there the veldt broke into a donga, and it certainly contained the usual proportion of hard-baked anthills, of the size of a large kitchen copper. But as the day advanced the Boer artillery broke up most of these, setting at liberty thousands — nay, millions — of ants, which became a torment even greater than the Boer rifle-fire.

Everything that Lord Methuen did was quickly noticed by our agile foe. After the battle, which, of course, was not until the following day, I had speech with three several and distinct captives; and each told me circum-

stantially that three times during the day, had Cronje permitted the necessary dash, the Boers could have broken our brigade.

The Ninth had necessarily a narrow escape. It had been ordered across the river, and the head of the column was well down the drift when the Boers, their entrenchments unnoticed, opened a withering fire of rifle, shell, and Maxim. Our men were thrown for just a minute or two into confusion, when the order to find cover was given. But the head of the column only avoided being cut off by doggedly sticking to the shelter afforded by sand and rubble heaps hurriedly thrown up.

In the meantime—and these constituted the two primary movements of the day—the Guards' Brigade had moved to the extreme left of the village and our extreme right, with a view of crossing the river simultaneously with the Ninth Brigade. Running on parallel lines with the Modder River is a minor stream, of

which the general officer leading the brigade, General Colville, had no knowledge in advance. "Holloa," cried Colonel Codrington, of the Coldstreams, "here is a river!"; and at the same time, from an artfully-concealed trench at the north side of this stream and between it and the Modder River, the Boers opened a terrific rifle and Maxim fire.

Nevertheless, Colonel Codrington invited his men to rush both rivers, and he personally was the first to take the water. At his right hand was Captain Feilding, 1st Coldstreams, and with two or three sergeants and the front rank of his regiment Colonel Codrington actually reached the north side of the Modder. The Boer fire, however, was just too hopeless for anything living.

Finding himself unsupported, Colonel Codrington retired, and in the hurry of their return several of the Coldstreams fell into "dubs," where drowning awaited them. Colonel Codrington

and those with him pulled the men out, and all taking off their garter-like puttees, a kind of leading rope was made. The Scots Guards had really been the first to come upon this precious ambuscade, but the Coldstreams suffered most, Colonel Stopford, of the 2nd battalion, being killed.

The men of the three battalions threw themselves on the ground, under the cover of a sand ridge, but they could neither advance nor retire in the face of the pitiless Boer rifle-fire and the murderous doings of the Hotchkiss, and here they remained until darkness.

Half the day had thus been got rid of, when the artillery was happily reinforced by the opportune arrival of the 18th Battery, which had marched forty miles in twenty hours—a splendid feat, as everyone ungrudgingly admitted. Both the cavalry and mounted infantry had rendered admirable service in the most intrepid dashes at the Boer entrenchments, and especially at the

houses and other buildings in which the enemy was posted. Whenever the Boer found himself at close quarters with the British, he fled. Thus building after building on the plain was cleared, and it was while leading a small storming party against a loop-holed house that General Lord Methuen was wounded in the thigh.

With the exception of half an hour about 2 p.m., the battle raged without intermission until dark. In the afternoon the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who formed part of the Ninth Brigade, and who came on the preceding night, got across the river and helped to turn the Boer flank, without, however, clearing the trench.

It was at this moment Cronje, watching the battle from the high ground at the north side of the river, planted one of his Long Toms in the main road and outside of the hotel. From this point he commanded the whole of our part of the field, with its firing line of five miles. But there was a more subtle

object in Cronje's mind, which once again proves the keen alacrity of the Boer to see and seize an opportunity.

By opening fire from this position the General, whose second in command was General Albrecht, designed to draw the British artillery and shrapnel fire exactly over the British troops holding the river. Our gunners, of course, were not alive to the subtle perils of the device, and at the first discharge the shell fell, as was clearly foreseen, amongst the gallant Highlanders, Fusiliers and Yorks, clinging by their eyebrows to the sides of the drift. But, happily, no harm was done. The artillery quickly found the range, and the Boer gun was silenced. One British shell at least was sent spinning and hissing into the Queen and Crown Hotel.

A feature of the battle, as of all the battles, was the absence of smoke. Another and more striking feature was the knowledge that, while the air was literally riddled with bullets and shriek-

ing with shells, there was nothing to indicate their place of origin. One might almost have asked, indeed, why we fired at these stone walls and rows of sandbags, and seemingly silent, empty, and peaceful houses. The heavy guns alone puffed smoke.

So it went on all day. The fighting lost nothing on the Boer side, in spite of the capture of successive positions; for, crossing the river, the fugitives took up their second line of defence, and fought this, also, like devils. Our men held their own down to the setting of the sun; then, when darkness put an end even to Boer endurance, we bivouacked upon the field, strewn as it was with dead and wounded, as well as with tons of Boer shot and shell. The surgeons had been unremitting in their solicitude for the wounded, but owing to the barbarity of the enemy it was found impossible to render all of them surgical aid, and only the worst cases were disposed of that night.

CHAPTER XVI.

Scene in the Boer Entrenchments.

UNDER cover of darkness Cronje removed his guns and evacuated a position resembling another Plevna for natural and artificial strength.

As soon as daylight permitted we entered the Boer entrenchments. What a scene was witnessed! Everything penetrable was literally riddled with British shot. The great congeries of buildings forming the refreshment-rooms were in ruins. The apartments had been constructed for the greater part of sheet-iron held together by rivets. These rivets had been destroyed, but the iron plinths still retained their hold above, and it must have been well they did so, for now the walls of the position, by swinging heavily, broke the force of the British shell and, indeed, afforded a useful screen to those within. In the garden flowers bloomed amid

the brass casings of shell and the fragments of shrapnel.

It had been a terrible business indeed. Through the wounding of General Featherstonehaugh at Belmont the command of the Ninth Brigade was given to Major-General Pole-Carew, and he was mainly successful in securing the capture of the north bank of the river under Boer fire. Before sunset he had got one thousand men across, and these, by taking the enemy in flank and rear, mainly secured the fortunes of the day.

No doubt, as Lord Methuen in his official account of the battle reports, the rifle fire was exceptionally heavy, but to the artillery belong the honours of the day. The artillery occupied a central position between the two British divisions, as well as in the centre of the right and left wings, and became the objective of the Boers' fire. Our riflemen operating on our right were obliged for the greater part of the engagement to seek cover, lying prone upon the

ground. The Guards lay under a veritable hailstorm of bullets, but the compound Hotchkiss, by being elevated too high, proved harmless. Curious that the Boer generals never observed the inadequate sighting. We had in action twenty-four guns, and it is estimated that each of these discharged two hundred rounds during the battle. After he took over the supreme command on Lord Methuen being wounded, General Colville had a narrow escape from a Boer shell. The fighting incident of the day was the fight for the north bank of the river, and it was here we made up our "butcher's bill" of sixty-three killed and three hundred and eighty-six wounded.

To revert to the scene in the entrenchments. Beside the flowers was a fountain of fine water, which was quite uninjured by our fire. But a store for drinkables, built of corrugated iron and fixed in a permanently sunless corner, had been wrecked with its contents by a shell. A brood of poultry pecked

about as if nothing had happened, and I am assured that the crowing of the parent bird of the brood could be heard above the roar of the battle. Modder, or Muddy, River is the sanatorium of Kimberley; it is the Thames of the Diamond City; and it is here that the jaded dwellers of that opulent town used to come, and where they would stay from Saturday to Monday. It is only a pretty place because of the relief of trees, and the Modder River Hotel ranks, I imagine, as a North African Star and Garter.

The unfortunate, as well as deeply regrettable, thing to face after all was the inability of Lord Methuen to push his advantage up. Had we possessed fresh troops, such as Germany or Russia would have had in a similar emergency, to throw forward and follow up our advantage against a flying enemy, Kimberley would have been relieved before the close of the week. Indeed, such was the enthusiasm of our men—their miraculous freedom

from exhaustion from either loss of rest, want of food, exposure, or sun sickness—that they would have gone forward and occupied Spytfontein, the very key now of the situation, before seeking even the rough rest of a tentless bed on the open veldt. But Lord Methuen decided for a big rest.

Thus Cronje and Albrecht, and those fighting fiends Creling and De la Rey, were relieved from an anxiety which their reading of Napoleon excited. While our men were resting at Modder River their men were busy in fortifying the series of kopjes which form the Spytfontein group, and to this was due Magersfontein, and all its horrors, its losses, and, I am afraid I must add, its humiliation.

No one, of course, will blame Lord Methuen's humanity, and he, perhaps, better displayed a soldierly caution by telegraphing for reinforcements. Still, to the paucity of our army in the first place, there has to be put the loss of a great opportunity of securing to our arms a nearly bloodless victory.

CHAPTER XVII.

Magersfontein and the Highland Brigade.

THE principal feature of the long artillery attack and final battle of Magersfontein was the breaking of the Highland Brigade. Our Naval Brigade went out after a week in camp and shelled the Boer kopjes forming the Spytfontein group. Some excellent play was made with "Joe Chamberlain," but by this exercise we secured but a *succès d'estime*, as the Boer generals craftily concealed the position of their men by withholding their own fire.

Our scouts had acquainted themselves with the strength of the Boers—now estimated at 15,000—but not with their entrenchments. We literally stormed these kopjes without drawing a shot, and Methuen determined upon a grand attack. That night, accordingly, the force engaged in the

artillery attack bivouacked where it had ceased firing. The Highland Brigade, now strengthened by the Black Watch, the Seaforths, and the Gordons, were ordered to leave camp after darkness, bivouac until midnight, and then march under instructions given to their officer commanding, who was General Wauchope.

The night was unpleasant, heavy rain falling out of a hot, dank, fever-generating atmosphere. At one a.m. the Brigade was again under way, it having been reinforced by a battalion of the Coldstreams, the Rifle Brigade, and other infantry regiments. The darkness was so profound that the utmost difficulty was experienced in keeping the battalions, marching in quarter-column and close order, in touch.

In the end the grey sheen of dawn was in the skyline before the Brigade had accomplished it purpose. And what was that purpose? In some quarters it was assumed that the Highlanders were to have charged the

trenches under cover of darkness and bayoneted the Boers there. By others an alternative scheme was suggested—to surprise the Boers by a vast investing force of infantry, which should rush the kopjes and such intrenchments or riflepits as disclosed themselves.

But suddenly, and with the warning of a single Boer outpost sentinel, a murderous fire was opened upon the Black Watch. The fire in three long lines or ridges almost dazed our men, and the Brigade, which received it on the centre flank, became indented enough to form a crescent. A counter attack was ordered, but the fire being renewed with even greater violence, the Brigade broke, the men rushing from the very ridge of hell, as it seemed.

The Guards endeavoured to secure a flank position, and the Black Watch deployed, but the move intended was never executed. The confusion created was such that regiments got mixed, and the men in their momentary flight trod upon or fell over those who, more wary

or cooler-headed, had thrown themselves prone at the first fusillade. Of course the confusion was short-lived, and very quickly men found their own ranks, but the gaps were appallingly frequent, and then there was a rush of rescue parties. The Boers continued to blaze away, and as daylight gained strength the artillery got to work and the action became general. A gallant, but futile, effort was made in the afternoon by the Gordons to avenge the morning. The battle raged for almost the entire day without our gaining a single point. But the real incident of the engagement remained—the attack upon the Highland Brigade, a shocking and regrettable "accident," due to miscalculation and the unrecognised vicissitudes of an imperfectly understood ground. The calamity of the day was the loss of General Wauchope, killed almost at the first discharge from the Boer riflepit.

CHAPTER XVIII.

General Wauchope's Death.—A Dramatic Rumour.

THERE is a camp story that, feeling himself mortally wounded, Wauchope turned towards his leading rank and file and said: "Lads, I am not responsible for this. I have merely obeyed orders." With the exception of the battle of Omdurman, General Wauchope was wounded in every engagement that he took part in. There is also a story that in England he laughingly spoke of his proneness to be wounded, and gaily wondered if he should have a Mauser bullet added to his collection of foreign "pills." At Orange River, on the afternoon of the departure for the front, I went into the room of the Camp Commandant for a pass over the bridge, and spoke to General Wauchope, who happened to be the only officer there. I do not

know what put it into my head, but as he looked at me it seemed as if I gazed into the reflection of death. More than one officer so far shared my eerie impression as to say that "Every fellow mortally hit knows it's coming."

But, personally, I have not succeeded in proving the legend attaching to General Wauchope's death. It amounted to mere gossip, and the man or men who heard the words have not been found, like the man or men who heard the word "Retire." That the "accident" arose less from the nature of the work in hand than from the nature of the ground, the darkness of the night, intensified by the rainfall, resulting in the breaking of the Brigade, I am assured by the independent testimony of two colonels who were in the mess. The Brigade really lost its way and by grim chance drifted towards Cronje's "trap." I have also been unable to trace to any foundation one could possibly accept, the story of a "row" between Lord

Methuen and Wauchope. That I think also extremely improbable.

Were the Boers heavy losers by the four undoubtedly great battles that I have sketched? I have been unable to find evidence supporting our own sanguine estimates. Our shell did execution when it fell into the centre of an entrenchment, or found a weak and crowded opening in the kopjes; but it is manifest that these advantages did not compare with those enjoyed by the Boer sharpshooters, who, in their almost impenetrable cover, and also in open order themselves, could pick off our men exposed on the veldt.

Here is an incident which, perhaps, may illustrate how the enemy comes out of a contest with the rifle. At Modder River two Boers cleared out of a building, turned and confronted two Scots Guardsmen. A Boer promptly shot one of the Scots, which act a comrade as promptly and splendidly avenged. But hardly had he brought down the point of his Lee-Metford than a Mauser bullet

rattled through his own brain. The surviving Boer then whipped up his comrade and dashed down the drift.

Whether our method of fighting the Boers is exactly the best suited to us is a question for the public to consider, and consider very seriously. Whether General Buller is satisfied with it we shall probably hear after the lessons of the Tugela River have been duly digested. Our "system" has cost us 10,000 British troops in dead, wounded, and captured, besides the death of two generals and the investment of a third, and he, at the time, the second in command. And all before the campaign was more than ten weeks old.

The appointment of Lord Roberts and of Lord Kitchener to Capetown leaves General Buller free to fight it out in Natal, clear of responsibilities in the Western Colony.

Thus closes the first stage of the campaign; and its severe test of the gallantry of our troops is not, I cheerfully predict, likely to be repeated now.

CHAPTER XIX.

Lord Methuen in Camp.

THE public at home have been led to form an adverse opinion of Lord Methuen's advance as a display of generalship. These adverse views are partly the result of the necessarily restricted service of war news from the field, and the cramped freedom of the press correspondents under the control of Major Streatfield, albeit the most genial of men and the most free-handed of military censors. But the ingenuity of these attacks has only been equalled by its persistency, and both by their injustice. I do not intend to either eulogise or hold a candle to Lord Methuen; but it may be said, at least, that until checked at Magersfontein, he had won each of the battles in which his force was engaged. The question whether these battles might have been avoided altogether is one that touches

the problem of the campaign as a whole, particularly in relation to the relief of both Kimberley and Natal by way of the Free State. Lord Methuen may not be a Wellington or a Marlborough, a Grant or a Lee.

One looks into Lord Methuen's sweet eyes with the hope rather than the certainty that in emergencies they would flash with potentialities, rather than with the conviction of finding them with the occasion. In his build Lord Methuen is big-framed and loose knit. In his war "kit" of khaki and drab puttees, walking with bent head and rounded shoulders, his l s curved outwards, as if from a life's growth in the saddle, he suggests from a rear view nothing so much as the back end of a dromedary dragging itself across the veldt. Not that one meets with dromedaries on the veldt; save a sheep, a horned beast, a wistful Kaffir, or a Rimington scout, one meets with nothing to break the monotony of a long ride across the veldt. But Lord

Methuen may graciously pardon the simile.

Lord Methuen almost invariably carries his hands across his back. This is quite a characteristic feature of the General's gait. He clasps one arm above the wrist with the other hand, for Lord Methuen's long and supple limbs seem capable of any convolution which the governing brain might inspire. Of course no intelligent or speculative observer either meeting or following Lord Methuen could fail to recognise the presence of a somebody of importance or distinction. And in this aspect of his personality the author of Magersfontein is at least distinctly interesting.

He has extraordinary self-confidence, coupled to faith in his army, which he believes in keeping up to a German-like point of efficiency. His partiality for night marches is a survival of his reign as Commander-in-Chief of the Home District, when the Honourable Paul appointed Saturday night for a march out into the suburbs.

The Commander-in-Chief at Modder River is very fond of didactic sayings or pretty paraphrases. In a military lecture he laid down the maxim that "the advance of an army should be regulated by the rate of the slowest waggon." But Lord Methuen did not put this maxim into force at Belmont, where his men advanced to battle upon the gnawing hunger of twenty-eight hours. After Magersfontein he met the calamity of the Highland Brigade by the contention—the Wolseley proverb—that the word "forward" and not the word "retire" should be alone admitted to the vocabulary of the British soldier.

An enthusiastic writer has spoken of Lord Methuen as a master of tactics. General Cronje wondered we did not push up our victory at Modder River by a dash on Spytfontein. Then Kimberley might have been relieved in time for Mr. Rhodes' Christmas ball. I remember meeting Lord Methuen one hot afternoon in the camp at Orange

River. Two soldiers were dressing the carcase of a pig, at which the General glanced with a smile, and then turning to me he said, with a grimace, "Not exactly the weather for pork, eh?" One night at Fincham's Farm, where we both lay, I recollect as I passed his chamber, the door being open, hearing Lord Methuen say in his sleep, "We ought to capture those two guns." As a matter of fact, they had been captured on the previous afternoon.

A love of the picturesque really is the strongest strain in Lord Methuen's character. In framing the Kimberley Column he had what is known as a free hand. He mobilised it very much as he formed the Light Horse that obtained his name. This column was to combine the three qualities of strength, lightness, and swiftness. It should be the lightest and yet the strongest flying column known since Roberts's famous march from Cabul. It should, if possible, consist as a starting point of ten thousand men, mostly infantry — the

flower of the line, with a proportion of artillery—a screen of cavalry, forming in large part his own escort, and with ambling scouts from Rimington's "tigers." The baggage train was to be limited to ammunition, biscuit, and bully beef waggons. Tents and servants, and personal baggage were forbidden. Only three press correspondents would be selected to accompany the column, and two men were to share one horse between them. The open veldt was to be the bed of all; the stars their canopy; and deeds of gallantry were to afford the nutriment which ration trains, belated in drifts, might fail to provide on the threshold of battle. Lord Methuen would set a good example to all, and especially to the "one horse two men" grumblers, by himself limiting his personal comforts to an Indian blanket. Over and above all, as the justification of this light, swift, strong column, Kimberley was to be relieved within eight days from Orange River, and the relieving army was to forget its

long marches, its exposure upon the veldt, its battles upon a drink of decomposing water, in the pleasures of the Promised Land, and the orange groves, which would mark alike the repose and the artistic instincts of Mr. Cecil Rhodes in his semi-captivity.

Lord Methuen did not reach the Diamond City in the self-appointed eight days, and for the reason why, this is not the place to inquire. The gallant General fights his battles with a cheerful heart. He is quite cool in action, if anything a little too bold, which, however, is explained by that love of the picturesque to which allusion has been made. He was wounded at Modder River while doing what he need not have done to sustain a reputation for bravery that no one doubted. If surprised by the enemy or if taken at fault in the search for information of the enemy's doings or whereabouts, he cheerfully congratulates his men upon having condoned the shortcomings of the Intelligence Department. Of course,

Lord Methuen would not put it exactly so. He would rather reproach the Boers for having kept their secret so well. They are sneaks, traitors, rogues all; but, happily, vengeance is the Lord's, and "Tommy" is the Lord's high executioner. So quotha Lord Methuen.

Lord Methuen is a handsome man personally. His face has the almost ideal military "cut." It is suggestive of the tented field, rugged, keen, its light moustache throwing into a background of deeper yellow the perennially bronzed complexion.

Yet, if the most stirring or noticeable figure to be met with in the headquarters' staff, he seems instinctively to suggest want of intellectual and physical proportions. He is visibly a man of nervous indefiniteness. The twitching fingers as they grasp that forearm; the feverish alacrity of gait, which some would call restless energy; the earnest, speculative trifling over infinitesimal details, all go together to rob the gallant inventor of Methuen's

Horse of that commanding repose for which you look in our strong man.

Lord Methuen is really a bit of a dilettantist. He studies the form of the picturesque soldier, but without posing the while, or displaying what is called "side." His manners are less of the camp than of the drawing-room or the library. Following Lord Wolseley's example as a teacher of wise saws and modern instances in military doctrine, as the right diet for the Linesman, from the recruit to the complete private, Lord Methuen speaks quite by the book, the "Soldier's Pocket Book." In a drawing-room his most noticeable feature is his modesty of demeanour. He seems to take a genial interest in everything, as Mr. Labouchere says of his own intentions towards a new Parliament; but the gallant General stands wistfully waiting to be addressed instead of pushing his way forward or about the *salon*. His smile, too, is a pleasant thing to see, and his voice is musical to the ear.

CHAPTER XX.

Which Mainly Concerns General Cronje.

THE British nation has not yet so far Napoleonised Mr. Cronje as to make of him a Saturday night bogey for the subjugation of a rebellious nursery. And it is well that the mother of the Paladin of the future should look elsewhere for cradle terrors. Cronje's early reputation, it is true, was enough to frighten not only our children, but their parents, into praying to be delivered from such a fiend. But Cronje then, as later, was simply a business-like butcher. To him war was an invitation to go forth and to kill; and to kill, moreover, with all thy might. That is how he kills to-day. But he works his abattoir pleasantly enough. He has really not studied the gentle art of making enemies. It has been a matter of complaint by our

officers forming the pheasantries of South Africa that this war has not been at all sportsmanlike. The British were killed by a smokeless bullet, propelled by an unseen marksman. That is to say, Tommy Atkins and his lion-hearted, if occasionally muddle-headed, leaders never could see the man that killed either.

General Cronje is lion-hearted, too; but he is never muddle-headed. He is of smallish stature and somewhat delicate appearance. His face, embellished (or otherwise) with the national beard of the Dutch Republic, is pleasant to look upon. It is not the face of a warrior or of a killer of men, but suggests homelike precepts against violence of any kind. Looking, indeed, at some schools of sacred painters to be met with in art tramps upon the Continent, I should, without intentional irreverence, describe Cronje's as a Christ-like face. Its expression is rather of sorrowing kindliness, of a wistful desire to live at peace with the world,

of a man who would exist cleanly, pay his debts, and go to bed on the right side of midnight.

It may be, perhaps, that in their epistolary intercourse during the bombardment of Mafeking, Cronje was brought under the civilising spell of Baden-Powell's polite letters to the enemy. Certainly B.-P. wrote with a frank and graceful touch capable of winning over the savagest brute who was qualified to read either sound English or bad Dutch. B.-P. wrote both with equal facility and felicity; but no matter, Cronje responded pleasantly to each alike. No doubt the Boer Paladin had learned to admire the soldierly qualities and the strategic craft of the defender of Mafeking. At any rate, his letters to Colonel Baden-Powell had the effect eventually of giving away his own early reputation for butchery without quarter. However, be this at it may, he is to-day a warlike counterpart of the proverbial type of Old Bailey lawyers, who abuse one

another professionally, and are the best of friends privately.

Not that Cronje carried his ensanguined friendliness to an extreme. On our part, the quaint if new habit of fighting the Dutch by day and writing their chiefs polite notes afterwards was carried somewhat past a fine art. At any rate, there is a legend that Cronje found it expedient to write the affable Lord Methuen, declining to receive from the British General any more letters "until the war is over." At the battle of Modder River, our Paladin was a curious mixture of urbanity and ferocity, the latter, however, in the minor proportion to the whole. The Compadour of the Mount Modder Hotel—called, if I remember it, the "Queen and Crown"—who stood bravely by while the proprietor and his family lurked in the cellars, told me on the day the British crossed over that during the hottest part of the engagement Cronje walked about the inn yard smiling. He regretted, he

said sweetly, that the British should have disturbed the Compadour and his employers, and, bending over a brooding hen, lifted an eighteen-day egg, cracked the shell, and dropped the ligamous contents with evident appreciation down his throat. He then returned into the high road, and encouraged the gunners with their "Long Tom" to make smart answer to our "Joe Chamberlain."

To sum up General Cronje's character, it is masterful before all things. The man is absolutely fearless, and is as full of resource as the whole of the military Moltkes of Pall Mall put together. He is a cynic after his own kind, and he displayed a little of his humour when, in a Parthian fashion, after Modder River, he warned Lord Methuen that if the latter followed he would be received with a "trap," and then awaited him behind an entrenchment fence of barbed wire, as I am credibly assured, "made in Birmingham." Cronje stands so well in the War Councils of Pretoria that he is

able to reject the peevish wishes and advice of the President. Cronje is a lively little man, who literally dances about his battle-fields. He is not at all serious in action, as we think a general should be. He looks upon the war as a not unpleasant exercise, has no sanctimonious regrets for his losses, and wipes up all counter reflections in the pleasing consciousness that we British truly confirm Carlyle's description of us as a "nation of thirty millions of people, mostly fools."

He is witty, saturnine, and full of domestic virtues and home kindliness. The Commander-in-Chief of the Western Army of the Dutch Republic scarcely conforms in manners or ferocity to the British fireside ideal Cronje. In an English suburban parlour he would be merely a gentleman with a beard; at Exeter Hall he would pass for a Sunday-school teacher, or at least for a middle-aged Christian, as against a man expert in all the engines of warfare and their use. Lord Kinnaird would

simply be delighted with General Cronje —at sight. When the heavenly time of a grand South African brotherhood shall be realised, as it will be from this struggle, and Boer and Rhodesian find no rival Rhodes to Colonial grace, and the German Israelites, sobbing in their soup at the Mount Nelson Hotel, Capetown, at money locked up in Kimberley, or over the fall in values around Johannesburg, shall have been appeased, we may see the victor of Magersfontein smiling under the wing of Sir Ellis Ashmead Bartlett in the special gallery of the House of Commons, admitted on an order signed by the Colonial Secretary.

The foregoing sketches of Lord Methuen and General Cronje, written at close touch, have appeared substantially in the *London Echo* (to which acknowledgment is made) as contributions from the present writer. Cronje seems to live the life of a will-o'-the-wisp, and such are the calls of Pretoria and the rapidity of his own movements,

that after his undoubted victory at Magersfontein he dashed with a portion of his force eastward to assist in repelling Buller's attempt to relieve Ladysmith. His absence was not suspected by the British camp until the news of his return reached it. Such is the energy of General Cronje.

CHAPTER XXI.

Reflections on the Guards' Brigade.

THE Guards' Brigade have seen in the present campaign more fighting, and of a severer character, than the Brigade has known since the Crimea. I remember hearing one private of the Coldstreams say to a comrade after Belmont: "Say, Bill, what price Omdurman after this, eh?" Still, again, at Tel-el-Kebir, and again at Omdurman, it is said, we know that they gallantly stood in martial array, waiting for bullets which never came as far as their entrenchments. But in the present campaign the Guards have occupied a foremost place in the fighting line. The Grenadiers, the Scots Guards, or the Coldstreams—one or the other of these fine regiments has been given a first place in the position to be taken and attacked, and

all have shared the hazards and the glory of the day.

This will be good news to the thousands of friends, personal and public, by whom the Brigade is held in such just esteem in London. When our bearskins return one may imagine the reception which will await these intrepid warriors, upon whose colours will have to be added "Belmont," "Graspan," "Modder River," and "Magersfontein." It was the Coldstreams that endeavoured to rally the stricken Highlanders on that triple "ridge of fire," and here it was that Colonel Codrington, who previously led a forlorn hope under my own eyes across the Modder River, in the Waterloo of the Victorian Era, was wounded. Colonel Codrington was hit, like General Lord Methuen, in the thigh, and Count Gleichen in the head. Both officers afterwards were invalided to the Military Hospital at Wynburg, Capetown, and the wonder of the rapid cures made must always be remembered—

that of Count Gleichen, who was really badly hit.

The losses amongst the rankers have proved so heavy, however, that I am afraid to think of the track of sorrow that must follow the return of the Brigade to the Metropolis. I draw a decent veil over the sickening anxiety of the girls of the perambulator of the Bird Cage Walk and the Green Park. Many of these young ladies, wheeling their infantile charges in all innocence of the losses they have sustained, will look, and look in vain, for the once familiar faces. As I have said in detail, my friends the Guards held Methuen's right, and assisted in hurling the Boers slowly across the river. Cronje had brought into action a fearsome mixed monster, called that Nordenfelt-Hotchkiss, which, though happily it lost the range for further mischief, succeeded in splitting the Maxim of the Scots Guards and killing those in charge of it. Lying in scanty cover, with a crescendo of Boer Mauser

bullets continually flying over their heads, the Grenadiers chatted merrily, or slept, or smoked, until nightfall put an end to the battle, and General Cronje showed his deference to superior force by "sneaking" away his guns and dead across the river in the night.

Seldom have English troops these very many years been engaged in so tough and so prolonged a struggle. Lord Methuen has called it the bloodiest battle of the century. Practically it began with the rising of the sun, and ended with the going down of the same. This meant from 6 a.m. to 7.30 p.m. It was fought under a withering sun, and in an atmosphere from which all movement had been blown by continuous artillery and rifle fire. Shot, shell, Maxim, Nordenfelt, Hotchkiss, and rifle contributed to the deafening carnival of battle. In all the thirteen hours and a half there was but an interval of twenty minutes; and as the day advanced the ferocity of the

fight increased. A striking feature of the battle was the absence of smoke and fire, as well as of the enemy, so that no one fighting the Boer entrenchments could really tell whence the bullet or the shell that wounded or slew him really came.

Yet the lesson is great. For the first time we had a battle in which the new machine guns—I may say the newest machine guns—and the newest explosives took an equal part. It was as if two Woolwich gun factories had been suddenly endowed with vitality and had attacked each other with its own weapons. Our men were horribly exposed to the Boer fire, standing, as they did, upon a rising ground. But they fought as only English troops can fight, and as coolly as if on parade.

CHAPTER XXII.

Waiting for the Next Move.

WHILE it is true that the picturesque pleasantry how we were "shelled with blunders" must take its place only as a pleasantry, it is undeniable that we have not shone as a military power in this campaign. With the exception of Lord Methuen's column the British army is where it stood three months ago. The enemy has in the interval improved his own reputation, and, unfortunately, at John Bull's expense. The Boers, clever at entrenchments, at finding concealment in rocks, at being over the top when we are shelling the front of a kopje, are clever at the art of fighting so as not to be killed. In their ground entrenchments each man is separated by a good Mauser length from his neighbour's right and left. Thus, if a shell should flop right into the trench and do its worst, which in

our view would be its best, it could kill but two or three men at most. Methuen had a force almost entirely composed of infantry. He had a small screen of cavalry and a battery of field artillery. This was not the kind of force he should really have had, and the fault of its composition rests really with Pall Mall. What we wanted at Belmont, and again at Graspan, was light cavalry and mounted infantry in abundance, with three additional batteries of artillery of quick-firing long-range guns. What we needed again at Modder River was heavy artillery capable of literally smashing the Boer defences, and a number of howitzers able, by a dropping fire of shell, to rake the sand-bag pits and the entrenchments of the enemy. Finally, what we should have had at Magersfontein was all these artillery forces in combination, and not rifle fire and bayonets to be used against entrenchments upon which mounted infantry were making rear and flank attacks. But those who organised the

campaign went in strong only for infantry brigades, which are practically wasted. What we wanted really was that which would have just met the Boer on his own ground and played the game as he plays it, with, of course, the addition of mounted infantry to equalise Boer mobility and enable us to turn his position.

At Belmont Methuen was unable to commence with a shell overture, because his artillery was inadequate for all purposes. He is blamed, also, for making frontal attacks upon Kaffirs Kop and its neighbouring hills. He has borne testimony to Boer mobility. But, at least, it may be admitted that the attacks succeeded, and that the loss in killed and wounded on our side was slight in comparison to the thousands engaged. The truth is, as I have pointed out, and it is a pleasing truism, the Boers are not the supernaturally dead shots popularly supposed in England. If they were—well, between Belmont, Graspan, and Modder River,

Lord Methuen's brigades would have disappeared, literally mown from the earth, and Magersfontein, our first and only check, would have been unfought.

Since Glencoe and Elandslaagte, where we scored our initial and misleading victories, many things have happened. Defeats and disasters that followed warned us neither to underrate the enemy, nor to believe in the early close of the war. The filling of the gaols of Pretoria and Bloemfontein with British prisoners was a disenchanting sequel to the joy of that mess dinner at Orange River; and the shutting up of General Sir George White in Ladysmith not only presented a certain element of irony, but called Sir Redvers Buller to Natal; and the abandment of the De Aar plan of campaign.

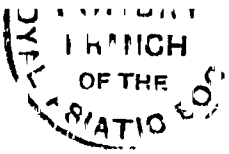
Yet even then we had not learned to fight our Boer as he should be fought.

The attempt to relieve Ladysmith by the Colenso Road resulted in a first blow to Buller, avenged later by

Warren's capture of Spion Kop. Yet here again that grim jade Nemesis was upon our track, and London, which had not exhausted its rejoicing at the victory of Sir Charles Warren, was dismayed by the official account of his retreat.

Happily it is in consonance with the traditions of the British army to stumble to victories over blunders. And it will be so in our present campaign. What are called the blunders of our generalship belong really to the optimism of our War Office and the refusal of its Intelligence Department to believe that any power is equal to John Bull's, or that our army is not perfect in its organisation.

Our early troubles in South Africa arose from the omission of those who fitted out the Expedition to equip it with the right kind of material, and to select the fighting men best suited to Boer warfare.



CHAPTER XXIII.

The Light Side of the Campaign.

In the meantime and as a conclusion to my hurried narrative, and one more salient than complete, let me say that the war in South Africa is not all of darkness or sordidness, of slaughter, or of the lives that end in graveyards of the land of lost reputations. It has its light side.

One is, indeed, proud of our troops, whose courage no "surprise" could daunt, no exhaustion could paralyse to the hour of need, and who went foodless into action or waterless to bed.

As infantry I know none to compare with them, and I speak by the personal comparison of the legions of Germany and Russia and the splendour of the French brigades. The weird, repellant assaults upon those death-dealing

bastions of rugged stone, whose smokeless sides afforded no shelter for the veldt-exposed assailant, were repeated time after time with a light heart, which it would have been difficult to find, under identical conditions, in the infantry of any other nation. The enemy admired our men's tireless bravery as much as we cursed his truculent invisibility.

Even as they lay under the thinnest of cover at the Battle of Modder River for eight and ten hours together, with a crescendo of Boer rifle bullets racing over their heads, occasionally plugging up the sand about their ears, unable to either advance or retire, played upon also by shot and shell, Hotchkiss and Maxim, the Guards, the Argylls, the Yorks, and the "Fighting Fifths," and all the infantry of the line thus brought to cover, found diversion, some in jest, some in the pipe, and some again in sleep. Some, indeed, as I have said, were shot as they lay, unconscious in death's most beautiful counterfeit.

It was their regret that, lying in the bivouac, they witnessed Cronje hustle off his guns and retire in the darkness, without the power of jumping up and going in hot post after the retreating foe. But there were no orders forth- coming to do this, and Tommy is nothing if not a severe disciplinarian.

How did our men take their death? Without a moan. How their wounds? Without a groan to speak of. It was always the same—an epic in heroism.

I recall the story of an Irish private whose left foot lost its big toe from a shell. Contemplating his wound, the man said, grounding his rifle: "Ah, begorra, there 's eighteen-pence a day for life!"

During the retreat from Magersfontein, men of the Gordons, unconvinced of the hopelessness of the attack, would stop, turn on the flank of the column and, in sheer rage, kneel and fire in the direction of the Boer trenches.

Our officers, like their men, were

equally untouched by exhaustion or by the depression of this one-sided warfare. They were always cool, collected, smiling, from their general downwards to the latest or the youngest joined. It is this smiling contempt of death that explains the loss of brave Colonel Northcott and the wounding of General Featherstonaugh, as well as of many others I mourn.

After the battle of Modder River "Tommy" would-a-looting go, and many were the odd prizes that he brought into camp. A fat turkey and a good capon dangling from the sporeen of an Argyll presented an appetising picture to the men of his company. But anon you would meet a Northumbrian carrying a birdcage and a Scot wheeling a perambulator "lifted" in one of the Boer houses on the river bank. A Lancer was making heroic efforts to reconcile his charger to a squealing sucking-pig hanging from his holster. But what that young soldier meant to do with a child's bassinet,

or that other with a toilet table, who shall say? I regret that a severe illness closed my connection with Lord Methuen's hospitable camp before I could learn the destiny of these things.

THE END.

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